

PATHOGENESIS IN A SOCIAL ORDER:

A CASE STUDY OF SOCIAL BREAKDOWN IN A CANADIAN INDIAN COMMUNITY

by

Anastasia Maria Shkilnyk

B.A. (Honours) University of Toronto (1966)

M.A. Yale University (1968)

SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF URBAN STUDIES AND PLANNING  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

at the

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

October 1981

(i.e. Feb. '82)

©Anastasia Maria Shkilnyk 1981

The author hereby grants to M.I.T. permission to reproduce and to  
distribute copies of this thesis document in whole or in part.

Signature of Author

Department of Urban Studies and Planning

October 14, 1981

Certified by

Ralph Gakenheimer  
Thesis Supervisor

Accepted by

Chairman, Departmental Graduate Committee

Rotch

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE  
OF TECHNOLOGY

AUG 3 1982

LIBRARIES

PATHOGENESIS IN A SOCIAL ORDER:  
A CASE STUDY OF SOCIAL BREAKDOWN IN A CANADIAN INDIAN COMMUNITY

by

ANASTASIA MARIA SHKILNYK

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning  
on October 14, 1981  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the nature and extent of social breakdown in Grassy Narrows, a community of Ojibwa Indians in northwestern Ontario, Canada. The evidence is organized around conventional indicators: the rate of violent death, the rate of suicide, the incidence of illness and alcoholism, the rate of crime; the incidence of child abuse; and, family breakdown. In this community, not only have the rates of these indicators begun to diverge sharply from customary norms, but the rates have also exceeded the norms prevailing in other communities of similar size and composition.

The analysis of the origins and causes of the contemporary crisis in the community is focused by two key events in the recent history of the Ojibwa people: the relocation of the Band to a new site by the Department of Indian Affairs in 1963; and, the discovery of toxic methyl mercury poisoning in the English-Wabigoon River in 1970. These events symbolize much more complex interactions between the Grassy Narrows community and those internal and external pressures and forces that combined to rend the community apart. The temporal relationship between these two events and the onset of the symptoms of breakdown in the social order is central to the analysis.

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Ralph Gakenheimer  
Title: Professor of Urban Studies and Planning

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
List of Tables .....	(i)
List of Figures .....	(iii)
Preface .....	(iv)

### PART ONE: PATHOS IN COMMUNITY

Introduction to Part I. ....	2
Chapter 1. <u>The Indicators of Social Breakdown</u> .....	4
Violent Death .....	4
Suicide and Attempted Suicide .....	11
Alcoholism and Illness .....	17
Public Disorder and Criminal Offences .....	31
Failure to Thrive .....	49
Child Neglect, Abuse and Abandonment .....	58
Family Breakdown .....	72
Conclusion to Part I .....	78

### PART TWO: EXODUS TO EXTINCTION

Introduction to Part II .....	81
Chapter 2. <u>Origins and Early History of the Grassy Narrows Band..</u>	83
Chapter 3. <u>The Way of Life of a People: The Story of Maggie Land.</u>	90

Chapter 4.	<u>Worlds in Conflict: Disparate Concepts of Space and Time</u> .....	97
	Ojibwa Perceptions of Space and Order in Human Settlement .....	98
	Orientations to Time .....	109
Chapter 5.	<u>Man and Society: Relationships in Transition</u> .....	118
	The Indian Family .....	120
	Life Cycle Rituals and Identity .....	127
Chapter 6.	<u>Transformation in Community Life and Political Order</u> .....	139 ✓
	The Nature of Community .....	139
	Indigenous Forms of Social Control .....	144
	Political Organization and Leadership .....	151
Chapter 7.	<u>Relations with the Outside Society</u> .....	169
	From Treaty to the End of World War II .....	170
	From the End of the War to Relocation .....	177
	The New Reserve and Contemporary Conflicts .....	192
Chapter 8.	<u>Livelihood: Changes in the Mode of Production</u> .....	210
	A Sectoral Description of the Old Reserve Economy .....	212
	The New Reserve Economy: Government Intervention and Structural Change .....	245
	Social Effects of Economic Change .....	265
	The "Benefits" of the New Economics .....	280
Chapter 9.	<u>Relocation and the Decision-Making Process</u> .....	286
	The Decision to Relocate .....	287
	Planning the New Community .....	295
	Conclusion to Part II .....	305



### PART THREE: RIVER OF POISON

Introduction to Part III .....	310
Chapter 10. <u>"The Last Nail in the Coffin": The Poisoning of the River by Methyl Mercury</u> .....	313
Background: The Nature of the Poison and Its Effects .....	313
Methyl Mercury in Northwestern Ontario: A Review of the Scientific and Medical Evidence. ....	324
The Economic Impacts of Mercury Contamination ..	338
The Politics of the Mercury Issue .....	350
Conclusion to Part III .....	391

### PART FOUR: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary and Conclusions .....	395
Bibliography .....	420

## LIST OF TABLES

<u>PART ONE</u>	<u>Page</u>
I:1      Distribution of the Population at Grassy Narrows by Age and Sex: 1977 .....	5
I:2      The Record of Death at Grassy Narrows: 1975-1978 .....	6
I:3      Deaths at Grassy Narrows by Cause: 1959-1978 .....	9
I:4      "Other Accidents" as A Cause of Death .....	10
I:5      The Record of Attempted Suicide at Grassy Narrows: 1977-78 .....	12
I:6      Suicide as a Cause of Death per 100,000 Population .....	14
I:7      Admissions to the Lake of the Woods Hospital for Attempted Suicide by Drug Overdose: 1977 .....	15
I:8      Pattern of Alcohol Use at Grassy Narrows .....	23
I:9      Pattern of Alcohol Use by Age Group .....	24
I:10     Pattern of Alcohol Use by Age Group and Sex .....	25
I:11     The Record of Hospital Admissions for Traumatic Alcohol- Related Injury - 1977 .....	26
I:12     Days of Hospitalization for All Illnesses: Lake of the Woods Hospital, 1976 .....	29
I:13     Days of Hospitalization for Pneumonia and Upper Respira- tory Infection: Lake of the Woods Hospital, 1975 .....	30
I:14     A Case Study: The Court Record of Offences Against the Public Order .....	36
I:15     Charges Laid by the Ontario Provincial Police at Grassy Narrows .....	38
I:16     Adult Probation at Grassy Narrows: 1969-1977 .....	39
I:17     Occurrences of Crime per 1000 Population: 1976 .....	41
I:18     Juvenile Offences and Juvenile Probation at Grassy Narrows .....	42
I:19     Juvenile Offenders at Grassy Narrows: 1972-1977 .....	43
I:20     School Attendance at Grassy Narrows: 1977-1978 .....	52

I:21	Grade Progression and Achievement of Students at the Grassy Narrows Elementary School: 1971-1979 .....	54
I:22	Children in Care at Grassy Narrows: 1973-1977 .....	59
I:23	Number of Children in Care Per 1000 Population: 1975 ...	60

## PART TWO

II:1	Manpower Courses Held on the Grassy Narrows Reserve: 1966-1972 and 1975-1977 .....	246
II:2	Total Expenditure by the Department of Indian Affairs on the Grassy Narrows Reserve: 1969-1977 .....	250
II:3	Social Assistance Payments to the Grassy Narrows Band: 1961-1964 and 1968-1977 .....	253
II:4	Analysis of the Sources of Household Income at Grassy Narrows: 1977 .....	262
II:5	Analysis of Household Income by Source: Earned vs. Non- Earned Income .....	263
II:6	Level and Distribution of Household Income at Grassy Narrows: 1977 .....	267
II:7	The Relationship Between Household Income and Size of Household .....	268
II:8	Social Stratification According to Source of Income ....	270
II:9	Household Expenditures .....	283

## PART THREE

III:1	Relation of Clinical Symptoms of Methyl Mercury Poisoning in Iraq to Whole-Blood Levels of Mercury ...	322
III:2	Levels of Exposure to Methyl Mercury: Grassy Narrows....	329
III:3	Individuals "At Risk": Blood Levels of Mercury > 100 Ppb. Grassy Narrows and Whitedog Reserves .....	330
III:4	Guiding Participation Rates at Grassy Narrows: 1968-1970.	348
III:5	Total Expenditures by the Government of Ontario on the Grassy Narrows Reserve: 1972-1977 .....	380

## LIST OF FIGURES

	<u>Page</u>
<u>PART ONE</u>	
I:1      The Incidence of Violent Death at Grassy Narrows: 1959-1978 .....	8
 <u>PART TWO</u>	
II:1      Traps Held by the Grassy Narrows Band in the Kenora Area .....	218
II:2      Beaver Catch at Grassy Narrows, 1948-1978 .....	219
II:3      Mink Catch at Grassy Narrows, 1948-1978 .....	220
II:4      Muskrat Catch at Grassy Narrows, 1948-1978 .....	221
II:5      Furs Sealed at Grassy Narrows, 1959-1977 .....	222
II:6      Average Prices for Beaver and Mink Pelts in Ontario, 1948-1978 .....	228
II:7      Average Prices for Muskrat Pelts in Ontario: 1948-1978 ..	229
II:8      Commercial Fish Catch at Grassy Narrows: 1957-1969 .....	243
 <u>PART THREE</u>	
III:1     Map of the English-Wabigoon River System .....	325

## PREFACE

The title of this dissertation directs attention to two words: pathos, or suffering; and genesis, or origin. These two words have been chosen to describe what this work is about.

This is the story of a small community of Ojibwa Indians called Grassy Narrows. Located in a splendid setting of lakes and forests in northwestern Ontario, Canada, this community presents an awesome contradiction to its natural habitat for, unlike the natural order of things, it is headed not towards growth and renewal, but towards decay.

The temper and scope of this dissertation on the nature and origins of social breakdown in one Indian community will be better understood when I explain how this work came to be written. I first arrived in Grassy Narrows in November 1976. Under a six-month contract with the Department of Indian Affairs, I was directed to design and implement socio-economic development programs that might ameliorate the disruptions caused in 1970 by the pollution of the English-Wabigoon river by methyl mercury. My "development experience" in Chile and Egypt was considered adequate preparation for the conditions I would find in Grassy Narrows.

It did not take long for me to recognize that the problem at Grassy Narrows was far more complex and intractable than the problems of "under-development" and "poverty" as reflected in unemployment, poor health, sub-standard housing, and all the other indications of material deprivation. There was such poverty at Grassy Narrows, but something more fundamental seemed amiss. Unlike the desperate poor with whom I had worked in the Third World, the Grassy Narrows people seemed not to care

about what happened to them or their children. I felt acutely depressed by the apparent numbness of spirit in community life and the frequent incidents of social violence. During the first six months of my residence at Grassy Narrows, moreover, I not only lived in difficult physical conditions, but I was also isolated; the Indian people treated me with suspicion and indescribable indifference. I did not yet understand that this estrangement was not reserved for "outsiders"; it was a part of everyday social interaction in the community.

I returned home to Toronto in April 1977. For the next five months, the images and impressions of Grassy Narrows as a place somehow "broken" in spirit refused to go away. In September, I accepted a proposal from Chief Simon Fobister to return to Grassy Narrows and work with the Band Council. For the next two years of my residence in the community, I participated in efforts to organize employment projects, start a band store, fund an alcohol program, and develop a wild rice industry. My role as "trouble-shooter" and "go-between" developed out of countless meetings with federal and provincial government officials over issues of importance to the Band. Gradually, as I came to know the people better, they let me listen to their stories about times past and times present. Slowly, as I came to understand the history of their community, I began to explore some ideas with respect to "pathogenesis" in community life.

This brief sketch of my relationship to the community may convey a sense of the emotional and intellectual climate in which this study was conducted. I do not claim neutrality or a "value-free" predisposition to the study of human phenomena. Through disciplined observation and the methods of survey research and in-depth interviews, however, I have tried to respect the best traditions of social science. I have listened closely, and over a long period of time, to what people themselves have to say about their history and their present conditions, and I have confirmed their perceptions with the judgment of others who know the community well. My own perspective, particularly on the issue of the

relocation of the community in 1963, was undoubtedly influenced by my own experience. As one whose family has been uprooted by war, I have a special empathy with all those whom the modern world uproots.

This dissertation is composed of four parts. Part One examines pathos in community. Part Two and Three deal with the two key events that symbolize much more complex interactions between the community and external pressures, namely, the relocation of the Band to a new reserve in 1963 and the discovery of methyl mercury contamination in the river in 1970. These events organize the data that pertain to an explanation of the processes by which the assault on the Grassy Narrows people was delivered. Part Four is an overview of the entire work and it presents my conclusions with respect to the nature and origins of social disorder as illustrated by the case study of Grassy Narrows.

PART ONE

PATHOS IN COMMUNITY



## INTRODUCTION TO PART I

At the end of Sheba's Hill, named after the old woman Taypaywaykejick whose house crests the steep climb, past the log ice-house, and at the intersection of the road going to The Point, lies the cemetery of Grassy Narrows. Casual visitors to the reserve in winter would hardly notice its existence or pay heed to a miniature shelter that rises incongruously out of the deep snow to mark the grave of a child. Even as the snow melts and the grave sites become exposed, one can see that there are no monuments to the dead. There are only some simple markings, some crosses, and the remnants of plastic flowers strewn about the unkempt ground. Only those who do not know what happened at Grassy Narrows can pass by this burial ground without thought or memory. For those who belong to this community, memory is rampant. There is no one on the reserve today who, in the last fifteen years, has not buried here the body of a parent, child, husband, wife, brother, sister, or cousin. The cemetery, death, and violence and a way of dying -- these have become the hallmarks of a community in crisis.

For those who have never lived under such conditions, it is difficult to comprehend that there could be a place, a human community, where the odds of dying a natural death from sickness, old age, or misadventure, would hover around 25%. Yet, at Grassy Narrows, if the recent trend continues, three out of every four persons will die from an act of violence. This extraordinary probability of violent death spares no one, regardless of age. For the young people under age nineteen, the odds of dying violently are even greater and their death more disturbing because they will probably die by their own hand.

There are other indicators that suggest that Grassy Narrows is a deeply traumatized community. Cases of acute child neglect, for example, were extremely rare among Indian people, known for their indulgent devotion to their young. At Grassy Narrows, however, in just one year, the Children's Aid Society had to take away over a third of the entire population of children between the ages of five and fourteen, because these children had been physically abused, severely neglected, or simply

abandoned. Such occurrences point to a discontinuity in the ability of many people at Grassy Narrows to care for and protect their offspring. When such evidence is viewed alongside data on the extent of alcoholism and alcohol-related illness among adults, the inescapable conclusion emerges that aberrant and self-destructive behaviour has become the collective norm for this society. Social pathology, usually confined to that portion of the population represented by the tail ends of a normal curve, has become represented by the main body of this bell-shaped curve. The data speak for themselves. The social conditions documented for Grassy Narrows are very serious, worse than those found among other Indian bands in the region, and comparable to those found in non-Indian populations that have experienced collective trauma. The first chapter is devoted to a portrait of Grassy Narrows, a community destroyed.

## Chapter 1.

### THE INDICATORS OF SOCIAL BREAKDOWN

#### Violent Death

In the early hours of November 7, 1976, the day of my arrival at Grassy Narrows, an eighteen-year old youth was killed by a gunshot wound to the stomach. David Fobister, an Ojibway Warrior and the brightest light of his generation, had been shot by the Chief of the reserve during a drinking party. As the wave of shock and remorse subsided in the community and gave way to preparations for burial, I learned that this was the fourteenth death from violence in the last year and a half.

There is no easy way to communicate the cumulative effect of a succession of violent deaths in a village of only 249 persons over the age of fifteen. Grassy Narrows is a place where everybody is related by blood or by marriage, and where death therefore touches not only one's immediate kin, but a much wider circle of relations. A not uncommon reaction by those who have been touched by this kind of death, either because they narrowly escaped it themselves, or because it claimed a relative or close friend, is to repress grief, guilt, or anger until these emotions can be released by the disinhibiting effects of alcohol. Feelings of aggression and rage normally suppressed in face-to-face encounters find expression during drinking parties when individuals turn to hurt their next-of-kin either through a vicious beating, or rape, or an act of violence which may lead to death. The drinking parties turn into a vicious circle in which the mourners often become the mourned.

Table I:1 shows the distribution of the living in the community of Grassy Narrows in 1977. Table I:2 shows the chronological record of the dead, 1975-1978.

Table I:1

DISTRIBUTION OF THE POPULATION AT GRASSY NARROWS  
BY AGE AND SEX: 1977

<u>Age Group</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>
0 - 4 years	37	32	69
5 - 9	40	29	69
10 - 14	57	45	102
15 - 19	36	33	69
20 - 24	23	15	38
25 - 29	13	13	26
30 - 34	11	13	24
35 - 39	14	15	29
40 - 44	14	5	19
45 - 49	4	0	4
50 - 54	6	3	9
55 - 59	3	2	5
60 - 64	2	3	5
65 - 69	8	3	11
70 - 74	4	3	7
75 and over	1	2	3
<u>Total Population On-Reserve</u>	<u>274</u>	<u>215</u>	<u>489</u>

Note: Nearly half (49%) of the total on-reserve population at Grassy Narrows in 1977 was under the age of 14. This represents a total of 240 persons. 63% of the total population was under the age of 19.

Data Source: Survey of households, 1976-77, the Community Research Project.

Table I:2

THE RECORD OF DEATH AT GRASSY NARROWS: 1975 - 1978

<u>Year</u>	<u>Month</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Cause of Death</u>
1975	January	Sammy Assin	21	* Stabbing
		Parker Keewatin	14	* Stabbing
	March	Robert Pahpasay	6 mo	* Child neglect
	June	George Petiquan	50	* Assault
	September	Camilla Loon	60	Illness
		Theresa Fontaine	40	* Gunshot wounds
	November	Alex Pahpasay	63	* Alcohol poisoning
		Mary Necanapenace	44	* Alcohol poisoning
		George Quoquat	41	* Alcohol poisoning
1976	April	Mary Loon	56	* Exposure
		Joe Swain	92	Old age
		Lawrence Fisher	25	* Alcohol poisoning
	May	John Turtle	19	* Drowning/homicide
	July	Mary Morison	36	* Suicide
	August	Mary Pahpasay	52	Unknown
	September	Gladys Pelly	54	* Exposure
	November	David Fobister	18	* Shotgun wound
		Baby Tanguay	1 mo.	* Infant death
		Agnes Necanapenace	80	Exposure
		Ann Marie Kabestra	1 mo.	Infant death
1977	March	Elizabeth Kokopenace	40	* Death by fire
		Curtis Kokopenace	4	* Death by fire
	July	Elizabeth Stone	29	* Hit by train
	September	Alan Pelly	25	* Drowning
		Twins/Strong	1 mo.	Infant death
		Rosie Necanapenace	70	Old age
	October	Mary Land	72	* Heart attack/alcohol
		Mary Keewatin	54	* Heart attack/alcohol
	December	Audrey Loon	12	** Suicide
1978	January	Sharon Keesick	14	** Suicide
		Alice Fobister	54	* Gunshot wound
	March	Alphonse Necanapenace	17	* Suicide
	May	James Swain Sr.	59	* Drowning/homicide
	July	Paul Pelly	44	* Assault

\*

Death related to alcohol.

\*\*

Death caused by an overdose of drugs.

Data Source: Records of Mennonite missionaries who have lived in Grassy Narrows since 1958.

People forgive each other for acts of violence committed under the influence of alcohol or drugs because they say that "the pain has to come out sometime". As an overall commentary on the contemporary community, however, the record of death is a grim picture of the progressive deterioration in the security and well-being of a people. Indeed, there has been a dramatic change in the way in which people die at Grassy Narrows. In the minds of many in the community, this change is associated with the move to "the new reserve" in the mid-1960's.

Statistical evidence on the pattern of deaths by cause over the last twenty years confirms the observation that violent death is a recent phenomenon at Grassy Narrows. This evidence is summarized graphically in Figure I:1 and elaborated further in Table I:3. The data clearly demonstrate that in the period 1959-1963 (prior to the relocation to the new reserve), 91% of all the deaths in the community were due to natural causes. In contrast, by the mid-1970's only 23% of all deaths could be traced to old age, illness, or accident. During the 1974-1978 period, 75% of all deaths were due to alcohol or drug-induced violence directed against others or against the self.

The incidence of death by violence at Grassy Narrows relative to the incidence of such death in the Kenora district, and in the province of Ontario as a whole, is also considerably higher. The Kenora-Rainy River District Health Council keeps regional statistics on causes of death. Under the category of "Other Accidents", the Council includes all causes of death other than death from natural causes and accidents, such as automobile catastrophes. Thus, this category corresponds to almost all alcohol-related violent deaths, such as those from drowning, fire, assault, or railway impact.

In terms of deaths caused by "Other Accidents", as a percentage of total deaths, Table I:4 examines the situation documented for Grassy Narrows in comparison to other areas.

Figure I:1

THE INCIDENCE OF VIOLENT DEATH AT GRASSY NARROWS: 1959-1978

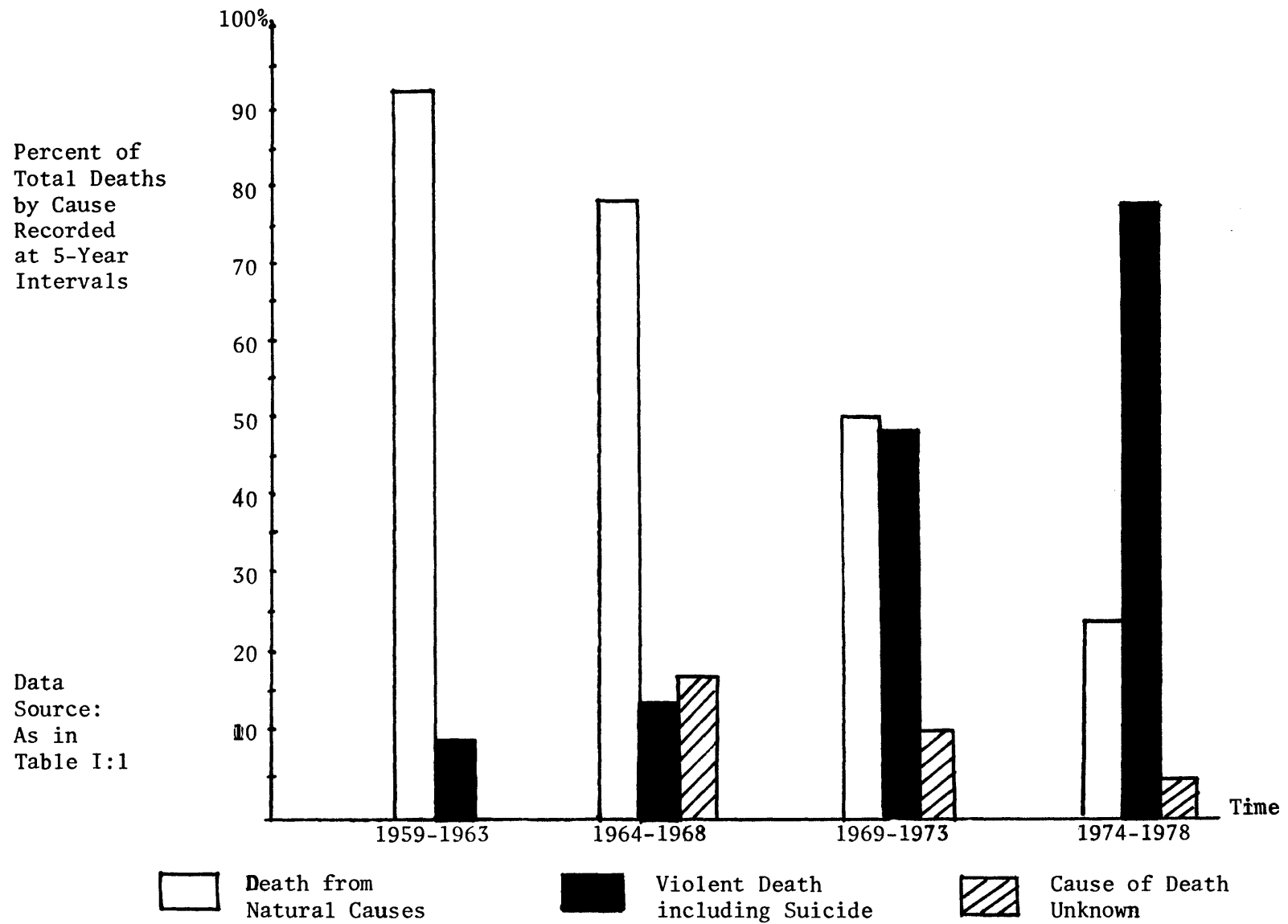


Table I:3

DEATHS AT GRASSY NARROWS BY CAUSE: 1959-1978

<u>Cause of Death</u>	<u>1959 - 1963</u> <u>No.</u>	<u>1964 - 1968</u> <u>No.</u>	<u>1969 - 1973</u> <u>No.</u>	<u>1974 - 1978</u> <u>No.</u>
<u>Deaths from Natural Causes</u>				
Old Age	7	4	3	3
Illness	3 — 91%	1	3	1
Misadventure	2	1	4	
Infant death	8	14	11	6
<u>Alcohol-Related Deaths</u>				
Homicide	2	2	10	12
Drowning			2	5
Exposure		1	3	3
Hit by train			1	1
Alcohol poisoning			4	4 — 75%
Death by house fire				2
Other				2
<u>Suicide</u>				4
<u>Cause of Death Unknown</u>		4	3	1
 TOTAL NUMBER OF DEATHS	 22	 27	 44	 44

Data Source: As in Table I:1



Table I:4  
"OTHER ACCIDENTS" AS A CAUSE OF DEATH

<u>Area</u>	<u>Percent of Total Deaths</u>
Province of Ontario, 1977	4.0%
Kenora District, 1977	16.0%
Grassy Narrows (average figure for 1969-1976)	52.4%

The higher incidence of violent death in the Kenora District relative to Ontario as a whole is related to the presence of twelve Indian reserves in this region. Almost all Indian communities in this district experience social problems associated with alcohol abuse. Within the region, however, Grassy Narrows is known as "the place where sudden death from violence is most likely."<sup>1</sup> It is a place where rage has been turned inward against one's kin and one's Self.

---

<sup>1</sup> While People Sleep, Sudden Death in the Kenora Area (Kenora: Grand Council Treaty No. 3, 1973).

### Suicide and Attempted Suicide

In the context of the Indian way of life, as in our own culture, the suicide of the young is considered a tragedy. Attempted suicide indicates depression, hopelessness, a loss of moorings, an erosion of the symbols and points of reference essential to life's continuity. A very high incidence of suicide or attempted suicide among the young in an Indian community is a signal that the society is in a state of great distress.

At Grassy Narrows, in 1977-78, twenty-six young persons between age eleven and nineteen tried to take their own life. Three succeeded; two girls of twelve and fourteen died from drug overdose and one seventeen year old boy shot himself in the head. The record of attempted suicides is presented in Table I:5. It is incomplete since it contains only those suicide attempts that came to the attention of the Grassy Narrows detachment of the Ontario Provincial Police.<sup>2</sup>In 1977-78, almost one-fifth (17%) of the entire population of Grassy Narrows between age eleven and nineteen wanted to die. These young people actively sought death as preferable to life, not because they had contemplated the meaning of life, but because (in their own words) they "had nothing to lose". Almost all came from families where there was heavy drinking; almost all had been physically neglected and abused. Deprived also of emotional nourishment, they chose suicide as a means of protest against life without love. The story of Amanda Lynn (pseudonym), composed from notes in my diary, illustrates the lament of childhood at Grassy Narrows. This girl was only twelve years old when she took her own life.

---

2

Table I:5 is a "police blotter", a record compiled routinely by the police. The record is incomplete because, during the summer of 1978, I knew of two attempted suicides by young women which were not reported to the police. These suicide attempts followed experiences of rape/incest.

Table I:5

THE RECORD OF ATTEMPTED SUICIDE AT GRASSY NARROWS: 1977-78

June 7, 1977	4:48 p.m.	15 years	female
June 21, 1977	4:10 a.m.	14 years	female
Sept. 2, 1977	5:35 a.m.	14 years	female
Sept. 2, 1977	5:35 a.m.	16 years	female
Sept. 21, 1977	5:35 p.m.	12 years	male
Oct. 5, 1977	10:34 a.m.	17 years	female
Oct. 6, 1977	9:45 p.m.	14 years	female
Oct. 15, 1977	5:45 a.m.	17 years	female
Oct. 18, 1977	5:15 p.m.	49 years	female
Oct. 24, 1977	8:28 a.m.	11 years	male
Oct. 31, 1977	7:45 p.m.	11 years	female
Nov. 17, 1977	7:00 p.m.	14 years	female
Nov. 17, 1977	7:00 p.m.	11 years	male
Nov. 26, 1977	4:50 a.m.	49 years	female
Jan. 4, 1978	2:50 p.m.	20 years	male
Jan. 13, 1978	1:30 p.m.	32 years	female
Jan. 26, 1978	11:55 p.m.	14 years	female
Feb. 1, 1978	10:45 p.m.	13 years	female
Feb. 1, 1978	10:45 p.m.	14 years	female
Feb. 5, 1978	3:30 p.m.	13 years	female
Feb. 5, 1978	3:20 p.m.	17 years	female
Feb. 7, 1978	10:30 p.m.	18 years	female
Feb. 12, 1978	7:00 p.m.	19 years	female
Mar. 10, 1978	11:00 a.m.	22 years	female
Mar. 13, 1978	7:30 p.m.	16 years	female
Mar. 24, 1978	7:20 a.m.	12 years	male
Apr. 1, 1978	12:05 p.m.	16 years	female
May 7, 1978	11:00 p.m.	16 years	female

Data Source: Records of the Ontario Provincial Police, Grassy Narrows.

December, 1977

Suicide of Amanda Lynn. She used to come to the day care center to make chocolate chip cookies with me. Her little band of friends would come to 'visit' because they had nowhere else to go when their families were drinking. If they couldn't take refuge in the day care center, they just roamed around the reserve all night, or until it was 'safe' to return home.

Amanda and her brother, older by one year, were badly neglected children. They were always dirty, always hungry, and poorly clothed for the harsh winter of Grassy Narrows. Their father was part of the 'broken generation', a man in his middle 30's, caught between the old and the new ways of life. He worked intermittently on the sawmill, but most of his income came from welfare and unemployment insurance. He was one of the heaviest binge drinkers on the reserve. His house was bare of furniture and most of his money went to buy liquor and ride to town in taxis. When he felt rich, he ordered a plane to fly him to Kenora.

I've been told that Amanda Lynn died on the same day that her father refused to buy her a new pair of rubber boots. In temperatures which dropped to 30 and 40 degrees below zero, she was still wearing an old and torn pair of sneakers. In the Hudson's Bay Store, she approached her father while he was cashing his welfare cheque. She begged him for new boots because her feet were freezing cold. In a conversation widely reported around the reserve, he apparently replied in the following manner, "Get out of my way...You don't give me anything, so why should I give you anything? I need the money for myself!" After that, Amanda killed herself by an overdose of tuberculosis pills.<sup>3</sup>

---

3

This passage is based on the notes from the diary I kept in the first six months (November 1976 to April 1977) of my residence on the reserve. During this entire period, I "camped" at the day care center, sleeping on a plastic couch near the kitchen. Although accommodations were primitive, the center was often a place of refuge for children, and sometimes adults. Thus I came into contact with people and slowly began to know them. In the above story, the name of the girl has been changed in order to protect the identity of the family.

Suicide by children and young teenagers, like violent death, is also a relatively recent phenomenon. Prior to 1970, no suicides were ever recorded at Grassy Narrows. In contrast, between 1974 and 1978, four people took their own life; three were teenagers age twelve, fourteen, and seventeen. Although the actual number of suicides, at first glance, may not appear to be significant, it is necessary to remember that even with an average of one case of suicide per year, a community of only 490 people has an extraordinarily high rate of suicide per 100,000 population, which is the customary base for comparing suicide rates around the world. The following table clarifies this point.

Table I:6

SUICIDE AS A CAUSE OF DEATH PER 100,000 POPULATION\*

<u>Population</u>	<u>Rate</u>
Canadian Population, 1974	12.9
Registered Indian Population in Canada, 1974	24.6
Registered Indian Population in Ontario, 1974	19.6
Grassy Narrows (average of one suicide per year)	204.1

With respect to suicide by drug overdose, Grassy Narrows has the highest rate of attempted suicide in the entire Kenora region. This fact is clearly demonstrated by the 1977 record of admissions for drug overdose cases kept by the Kenora Lake of the Woods Hospital. The comparative statistics are summarized in Table I:7. While the available data limit the comparison of attempted suicide for drug overdose to those cases that actually arrive at the hospital, it is clear that Indian reserves generally show a much higher rate of attempted suicide than non-native communities.

---

\*

Data Source: The Ontario Region Data Book, July 1977. This is a statistical volume on Indians in Ontario that I prepared for the Director-General of the Ontario Region.

Table I:7

ADMISSIONS TO THE LAKE OF THE WOODS HOSPITAL  
FOR ATTEMPTED SUICIDE BY DRUG OVERDOSE: 1977

<u>Locality</u>	<u>No. Cases*</u>	<u>Percent of Total No. Cases</u>	<u>Rate per 1000 Pop.**</u>
Non-Native Communities:			
Town of Kenora	41	34%	4.1
Keewatin	5	4%	5.3
Jeffrey Melick	3	2%	
Out-of-Town	5	4%	-
Native Communities:			
Grassy Narrows	19	16%	44.2
Whitedog	23	19%	38.9
Rat Portage	10	8%	40.5
Whitefish Bay	9	7%	20.7
Shoal Lake	7	6%	36.4
	<u>122</u>	<u>100%</u>	

\* The number of overdose cases represents only the number of first-time individual cases and therefore does not include people who have tried to commit suicide more than once.

\*\* The population for Kenora and townships is estimated at 11,500 persons. The population base for the five Indian reserves for which data on attempted suicide are available is calculated as 1,940 total population. It should be noted that demographic data for Indian reserves generally are notoriously incomplete. Based on my research at Grassy Narrows, for example, I know that the total on-reserve population is exactly 489 persons. The official statistics of the Department of Indian Affairs, however, give the Grassy Narrows on-reserve population as 430. For reasons of consistency in calculating the rate per 1000 population for each of the Indian reserves above, I have used Indian Affairs demographic data. The on-reserve population figures for each reserve are as follows: Grassy Narrows: 430; Whitedog: 590; Rat Portage: 247; Whitefish Bay: 434; and Shoal Lake: 192 (1977 data).

Data Source: Letter from Dr. P. Connop, Medical Services Branch, Department of Health and Welfare, to Chief Simon Fobister, February 20, 1978.

The combined rate of attempted suicide by drug overdose for the five Indian reserves in the Kenora area (Grassy Narrows, Whitedog, Rat Portage, Whitefish Bay, and Shoal Lake) is 35.7 per 1000 population. In sharp contrast, the non-native communities of Kenora and its surrounding townships show a rate of only 4.3 per 1000 population.<sup>4</sup> Because these comparative data are not age or sex specific by each locality, it is impossible to determine whether or not the extraordinary rate of attempted suicide, especially among females and very young teenagers between age eleven and fourteen, is unique to Grassy Narrows.

---

<sup>4</sup> There are actually twelve Indian reserves in the Kenora area, constituting about 21% of the total population of the district (according to the 1971 census). The proportion of the native vs. non-native population is now slightly higher because the natural rate of increase for Indian people vs. the Canadian population as a whole is higher. In 1975, the rate of increase for the Indian people was 2.3% vs. a rate of 1.5% for the Canadian population. DIAND estimates the total on-reserve population of the Kenora district to be 2,470 persons. The total population of Indian people living both on and off reserve is estimated to be 3,455 persons. Both estimates are for 1977.

### Alcoholism and Illness

The data with respect to the incidence of violent death and attempted suicide at Grassy Narrows suggest that very heavy drinking is a recent development associated with the late 1960's and 1970's. We find that deaths of infants from acute physical neglect are first recorded in 1969-1970 and deaths from alcoholic poisoning first appear in 1973. While mortality may be the most salient effect of heavy drinking in a community, alcoholism obviously has destructive consequences on public health and on relationships among family members, friends, and residents. A very high incidence of alcoholism and alcohol-related illness is another indicator of a community in distress.

The search for information on the extent of alcoholism, and on the severity of medical and social problems associated with it, is limited by three factors. In the first place, many of the data are available only on a regional basis. With very few exceptions, official statistics that would enable a comparison among Indian reserves in the region do not exist. In many instances, the provisions of the Ontario Human Rights Code prohibit the gathering of relevant individual data on the basis of ethnic or racial origin. In other cases, data are simply declared confidential. The dearth of comparative data limits the assessment of the extent to which one community shows particularly high levels of "social pathology" relative to other communities. It also hinders the evaluation of the differential impact of factors unique to any particular Indian reserve (for example, mercury poisoning at Grassy Narrows and Whitedog).

Second, with the exception of program data kept by the Department of Indian Affairs and its Kenora district office, the agencies of the federal and provincial government that deal with Indian people do not keep systematic or comprehensive files. Even if it were possible to extract information on a particular Indian reserve, this information often applies only to a single year. Other agencies, like the Children's Aid Society and the Ministry of Correctional Services, keep records only for five and three years, respectively. The absence of a data series over time limits the exploration of causal and historical influences on



contemporary social problems, just as the virtual paucity of systematic records on a reserve by reserve basis makes comparative work difficult.

Third, such official data that do exist on "social pathology" in the Kenora area are in any case hard to interpret because the population base of Indian reserves is small and other external influences may distort the figures.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the available data on the extent of alcoholism and alcohol-related illness are presented below. Unless otherwise indicated, data from Grassy Narrows originate from my own research.

We begin by looking at the overall trend in alcohol consumption in the Kenora region. It is important to consider the extent of alcoholism in Grassy Narrows in the context of the following observations: first, the northwest region of Ontario has the highest per capita consumption of alcohol relative to the province as a whole. Second, the statistics on a number of social pathologies markedly noticeable in Kenora are much inflated by the area's Indian population. Third, the relatively recent but dramatic increase in alcohol consumption by the people of Grassy Narrows in the 1970's finds a parallel in an overall increase in alcohol consumption by native people in the Kenora area, and indeed by people in northwestern Ontario generally. Alcoholism is now recognized as the most critical, and most disturbing, element in the life of Ontario's northern settlements. Perhaps the best summary statement of the problem comes from a 1977 provincially sponsored study on alcoholism:

"Alcohol consumption rates are higher in the Northwest and climbing even faster than the provincial rates....Liquor offence rates are higher in the Northwest, alcoholism diagnoses among hospitalized patients are more common, and mortality rates due to accidents, poisonings, and violence are elevated ....Kenora district is more notable both in

---

5

The "Hawthorn effect", for example, may be operative at both Grassy Narrows and Whitedog because, after 1970, much public attention was directed to these "mercury reserves". It is known that the more attention a community receives, the more apparent will be the evidence of social problems to outsiders and social workers.

terms of higher alcohol consumption levels and indications of consequences of heavy consumption . . . . Native Indians are overrepresented in hospital and detoxication centre populations in the Kenora area, and a high proportion of deaths among natives are due to accidental and violent causes."<sup>6</sup>

The per capita consumption of alcohol has been increasing in north-west Ontario at a rate double that of the province as a whole. Between 1969-74, there was a 34% increase in the per capita consumption of alcohol in the northwest region versus a 16% increase in the province of Ontario.

Although we do not have data measuring the difference between native and non-native people in the Kenora area with respect to their per capita consumption of alcohol, a significant qualitative difference in the style of drinking by Indian people must be explained. The way in which Indians use alcohol is at odds with the norms for drinking that are acceptable to the white society. The difference lies in the binge or spree nature of Indian drinking. This kind of drinking is not unique to Grassy Narrows or to Kenora area reserves, but has been described for Indian reserves across the country. The nature of spree drinking at Grassy Narrows is best illustrated by the following passage, composed from notes in my diary.

"On Friday, March 31 1978, the Band office paid out a total of \$20,370.10 in wages and approximately \$5,000 in social assistance. That day, the people of Grassy Narrows went on a binge that would last almost a week.

After very heavy drinking on the weekend, both in town and on the reserve, the people started going back to town on Monday to get more alcohol. On that day, April 3, it was possible to observe the number of trips to town being made by taxi or plane. Five planes took off from the community dock; five taxis took people to town. Some people

---

<sup>6</sup> Giesbrecht, N. and J. Brown et al., Alcohol Problems in Northwestern Ontario Preliminary Report: Consumption Patterns, and Public Order and Public Health Problems, Substudy No. 872, The Addiction Research Foundation, Toronto, 1977.

went to town with the medical van. The total cost of transportation to Kenora for the purchase of alcohol was \$1,050 for that day alone. Over the next three days, we observed eight more trips to town by plane (at \$120 per trip) and fourteen trips by taxi (at \$90 per trip). We calculated that of the \$25,000 paid out by the Band office, the people spent over \$14,000 on liquor in little less than a week.<sup>7</sup>

A typical binge has certain characteristics that distinguish it from the pattern of alcohol use among non-Indian people. First, the majority of heavy drinkers at Grassy Narrows are not necessarily "addicted" to alcohol in the sense of a physiological enslavement.<sup>8</sup> Most can follow a period of very heavy spree drinking with a week or two of abstinence, at least until the next payday. They can also stay sober for weeks while they are on the trapline. The obsessed and driven alcoholic of the Western world, the one who cannot function without a certain level of alcohol in the bloodstream, finds many fewer counterparts in the Indian world.

Second, Indian drinking is a social activity and rarely do individuals drink alone. At Grassy Narrows, alcohol is perhaps the only commodity that is shared widely among people. During a binge, people

---

<sup>7</sup> Notes from the diary, 1978. The spree during the first week in April at Grassy Narrows is usually longer and more sustained than the sprees that follow normal paydays. This is so because people receive their vacation pay at the end of March. Another big spree follows the reception of child tax credit cheques from the federal government. Many families receive a lump sum payment of \$1,000 or more. After the purchase of a limited quantity of food, and the payment of bills and fines, a significant proportion of such lump sum payments finds its way into alcohol-related expenditure.

<sup>8</sup> It has been suggested that Indian people are "behaviourally addicted" to alcohol in the sense that they seem unable to, or are prevented from, conceiving of any other goal or reward for their work other than drinking. The phenomenon of paydays followed by drinking sprees is common to Indian life in the Kenora area and has been noted as the pattern of alcohol use among Indians in the country as a whole.

move freely among houses looking for both alcohol and drinking companions. Each clan group has its own drinking network, and drinking is a family affair.<sup>9</sup>

Third, spree drinking is a continuous process and people drink until they become unconscious. During the alcoholic "blackout", many accidents occur, including acts of violence which cause death. Upon awakening from the blackout, people continue drinking until the entire supply of hard liquor, fortified wine, or beer is exhausted. It is at that point that someone will make a trip to Kenora to buy more alcohol. The trips to Kenora finally stop when the cash necessary to purchase liquor is depleted. Plane and taxi operators, however, extend credit for transportation to town and thus keep the Grassy Narrows people heavily in debt. Indian binge drinking is big business in Kenora.

Fourth, a prolonged binge is like a tornado that tears across the landscape of community and leaves devastation in its wake. During the binge, infants become dehydrated, children go hungry, women are swollen from beatings, young girls are raped.<sup>10</sup> The consequences of this mode of drinking tend to reinforce the perception of Indian drinking as pathological.

This brief overview of the nature of spree drinking sets the context for the consideration of the alcohol problem at Grassy Narrows. Tables I:8, I:9, and I:10 present data on alcohol use by age and sex.

---

9

Each of the major clan groups, the Kokopenace, Necanapenace, Loon, Assin, Pahpasay, Fobister, and Keewatin families, have their own "network". If the husband in the family is a heavy drinker, the wife is likely to be one as well. The children in the family will often drink too, after the adults have become unconscious.

10

The children go hungry in the houses where there is heavy binge drinking, because food is not an item of high priority for those who are drinking. Many adults eat very little during the spree. The children end up looking for food in garbage cans or vandalizing the school to get food from the school lunch program. In 1979, children also started to break into the houses of the teachers to get food.

Information on the amount of alcohol consumption, the frequency of consumption, and the level of expenditure on alcohol, was gathered for each Band member between age 16 and 64 resident on reserve during 1977. This inquiry was part of a comprehensive survey of all households carried out in the winter of 1977-78. Quantitative survey data were checked against personal knowledge of individuals and families so that persons could be placed in one of four categories of alcohol use.

The data indicate that at Grassy Narrows, two-thirds of the entire population between 16-64 can be classified as heavy drinkers. More startling is the finding that in the 30-44 age group of persons in their child-bearing and child-rearing years, 80% are heavy drinkers.

The data from Grassy Narrows support the observation that the community is in serious difficulty with respect to the extent of alcohol use, especially by the age group 30-44. Because alcoholism is a widespread medical and social problem in the region of northwestern Ontario, an important question is whether or not the conditions at Grassy Narrows are any worse than those found in other Indian reserves in the area.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup>

Alcoholism is a much more common medical diagnosis in northwestern Ontario than in the province generally. It ranks fifth as a hospital diagnosis in the Kenora region vs. 28th in the province as a whole. At the Lake of the Woods Hospital which serves the town of Kenora, the population of surrounding townships within a 50 mile radius, and the twelve Indian reserves around Kenora, the cumulative frequency of male and female patients with an alcoholic diagnosis has been rising very steeply during the 1965 to 1974 period, especially since 1969. The increase in alcoholic diagnoses for Indian people has been steeper than for non-Indian people, particularly since 1971. In terms of numbers, the rate of admission for alcoholic patients increased from one Indian female in 1965 to 55 Indian females in 1974. The corresponding increase for Indian males was from four patients admitted in 1965 to 39 patients admitted in 1974.

Further, alcoholic first admissions to the Lake of the Woods Hospital have been increasing at an average annual rate of 34% during the 1965-1974 period. The proportion of admissions for alcoholism vs. all other illnesses has also increased from 3.9% in 1969 to 8.9% in 1974. One out of eleven discharges from the Hospital involves a person diagnosed as an alcoholic.

The medical data on alcoholism in the Kenora area are summarized in the study by Giesbrecht and Brown, Alcohol Problems in Northwestern Ontario, pp. 108-115.

Table I:8

PATTERN OF ALCOHOL USE AT GRASSY NARROWS

In this table, and in tables I:9 and I:10 four broad categories are used to distinguish individuals on the basis of the frequency of their drinking and the correlates of their drinking behaviour:

"Non-drinkers" are persons who do not drink, or who drink occasionally perhaps once or twice a month in moderation.

"Social drinkers" are persons who drink moderately when friends and relatives are on the binge and who are trying to cut down on their drinking.

"Heavy drinkers" are the spree drinkers of the reserve. They will drink for an entire weekend after payday, but by Monday or Tuesday they will be sober and back at work.

"Very heavy drinkers" are those who are closest to alcoholism in the sense of a behavioural, and maybe a physical, addiction. They are alcohol-dependent and will drink whenever they have money to spend on the purchase of liquor.

In all the tables on alcohol use at Grassy Narrows, the statistics pertain to the population between age 16 and 64 living on the reserve at the time of the survey in the year 1977.

<u>Pattern of Alcohol Use</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Non-Drinkers	23	22	45	22%
Social Dinkers	17	8	25	12%
Moderate to Heavy Drinkers	30	34	64	32%
Very Heavy, Close to Addiction	40	28	68	34%
	—	—	—	—
Total	110	92	202	100%

Table I:9

PATTERN OF ALCOHOL USE BY AGE GROUP

There is a substantial increase in alcohol use in persons 30 to 44 years old, followed by a gradual levelling off as people reach the age of 50 and older. This is not coincidental inasmuch as it is exactly the 30-44 age group that suffered most directly from the onslaught on culture and the dislocation of the early 1960's. The children of persons in this age group also make up the statistics on child neglect and abandonment, school drop-outs, and attempted suicides.

Younger persons, age 16-19 and 20-29, tend to drink less than the rest of the population in their middle age. Often they are forced to drink by relatives who live in the same house and who are drinking heavily.

The first set of data gives the actual numbers of people in each category of alcohol use. The second set shows the percentage of the total number of people in that age group that falls into each category of alcohol use.

<u>Pattern of Alcohol Use</u>	<u>Age Group</u>				
	<u>16-19</u>	<u>20-29</u>	<u>30-39</u>	<u>40-44</u>	<u>45-64</u>
Non-Drinkers	17	16	8	2	2
Social Drinkers	15	4	2	1	3
Moderate to Heavy Drinkers	19	22	12	3	8
Very Heavy, Close to Addiction	-	22	28	10	8
	—	—	—	—	—
	51	64	50	16	21

	<u>Percentage in Each Age Group</u>				
Non-Drinkers	33%	25%	16%	12%	10%
Social Drinkers	29	7	4	6	14
Moderate to Heavy Drinkers	38	34	24	19	38
Very Heavy, Close to Addiction	-	34	56	63	38
	—	—	—	—	—
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table I:10

### PATTERN OF ALCOHOL USE AT GRASSY NARROWS BY AGE GROUP AND SEX

This table answers the question of whether or not there are significant differences in drinking pattern by men and women in the same age group. The differences are striking in the younger and the older age groups: for example, younger women tend to drink more than younger men. 52% of all the young girls between age 16 and 19 are moderate to heavy binge drinkers as opposed to 23% of all the young men in the same age group. This is not surprising because at Grassy Narrows, the young girls are often forced to drink by the older men; when the girls become intoxicated and semi-conscious, they are sometimes raped.

Older women over age 45 tend to drink less than the men in the same age group. Only 12.5% are very heavy drinkers, close to addiction, vs. 54% of the men. The percentages are used cautiously, however, because the actual number of persons age 45 and over in the total population of the reserve is small. In fact, 63% of the on-reserve population of Grassy Narrows is under the age of 19.

In the 30-44 age group, the differences between men and women in their drinking pattern are not significant. 26% of the women vs. 20% of the men tend to be moderate to heavy binge drinkers; 55% of the women vs. 60% of the men tend to be very heavy drinkers who are close to addiction.

The first set of data gives the actual numbers of persons in each category of alcohol use; the second set shows the percentage of the total number of males or females in that age group that falls into each category of alcohol use.

[illegible]



Table I:11

THE RECORD OF HOSPITAL ADMISSIONS  
FOR TRAUMATIC ALCOHOL-RELATED INJURY\*  
1977

	<u>No. Admissions</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>	<u>Rate Per 1000 Pop.</u>
Town of Kenora	70	37%	7.0
Grassy Narrows**	27	15%	55.1
Whitedog	32	17%	54.2
Whitefish Bay	16	9%	38.1
Rat Portage	13	7%	54.2
Keewatin	11	6%	-
Other	<u>17</u>	<u>9%</u>	-
	186	100%	

\*

The record of admissions to the Lake of the Woods Hospital Emergency Department for cases of traumatic injury related to alcohol abuse includes such cases as assault, suspected child abuse, attempted suicide by wrist slashing, overdoses, severe emotional disturbance, hysteria, and a variety of similar injuries.

Data Source: Same as in Table I:7. Demographic data used to adjust the data according to the population base are same as specified for Table I:7.

\*\*

Another source of information that establishes the relative position of Grassy Narrows to the Kenora District and to the Province of Ontario is the record of days of hospitalization for alcohol-related traumatic injury. The following data are cited in Hugh Brody, 'Social Impacts of the Loss of the Fishery', a chapter in a larger work by P. Usher et al., "The Economic and Social Impact of Mercury Pollution on Whitedog and Grassy Narrows Indian Reserves, Ontario", Unpublished paper, 1979, p.318.

Days of Hospitalization for Alcohol-Related  
Traumatic Injury: 1975

	<u>Rate/1000 Pop.</u>
Province of Ontario	4.2
District of Kenora	24.3
Grassy Narrows	128.2

Available comparative data are scarce; however, some indications of the relative circumstances of Grassy Narrows are to be found in statistics pertaining to hospital admissions for traumatic injury related to alcohol abuse, and to illnesses related to alcoholism. It becomes quickly apparent that the people of Grassy Narrows are suffering from exceptional stress, and that their difficulties, particularly in terms of illness, go far beyond those that trouble Indian communities in the region as a whole.

The statistics presented in Table I:11 show that Indian communities generally have a much higher population adjusted rate of hospital admissions for alcohol-related injury than the town of Kenora. The rate for Grassy Narrows is slightly higher relative to other Indian reserves. When days of hospitalization for alcoholism are the standard of comparison, however, statistics show that the population-adjusted rate for Grassy Narrows is about three times the rate for Whitedog, and more than double the rate for the Kenora district as a whole.<sup>12</sup>

With respect to the incidence of illness at Grassy Narrows and in the Kenora region, it is not at all surprising that the region as a whole has much higher rates of hospitalization for those diseases known to be connected with heavy alcohol consumption. Numerous studies have shown that typical health problems likely to be encountered among heavy drinkers include: certain diseases of the nervous system; problems with the digestive system and liver (acute and chronic gastritis and peptic ulcers, for example); respiratory diseases, such as chronic bronchitis, pneumonia, and tuberculosis; heart and vascular diseases; and, certain cancers, especially those of the upper respiratory and digestive tracts.

---

<sup>12</sup>

In his work, Hugh Brody has established the following figures for the days of hospitalization for alcoholism per 1000 population. In 1975:

Province of Ontario	15.4
Kenora District	64.3
Whitedog	36.0
Grassy Narrows	130.6

Hugh Brody, "Social Impacts of the Loss of the Fishery", p. 318. There are inconsistencies in data presented along this dimension, as between p. 312 and p. 318 of his work, but the pattern or trend is the same.

Statistics show that not only does the northwestern region have the highest per capita consumption of alcohol in the province, but that this region also has elevated rates for diseases of the respiratory system, digestive tract, infective and parasitic diseases, and mental disorders. Within the northwestern region, it is significant that the Kenora area has higher hospitalization rates (per 1000 population) for certain classes of alcohol-related diseases than other districts which also have a substantial native population.<sup>13</sup> The higher levels may well be a function of heavy alcohol consumption, but data that would allow this relationship to be explored further are not available. Other factors, such as relative isolation, lack of medical facilities in many reserve communities, overcrowding and poor housing conditions, lack of attention to water and sanitation, and poor nutrition may also play an important role in the etiology of illness in the Kenora area.

The special and rather extraordinary situation of Grassy Narrows is reflected best in comparative statistics on the incidence of hospitalization for illness. The fact that rates for Grassy Narrows are so much higher than the rates documented for other Indian communities suggests that neither the common historical experience of the Kenora area

---

<sup>13</sup> In 1975, for example, the days of hospitalization by category of illness for the Kenora area are shown as a multiple of the rate prevailing in the province of Ontario as a whole:

Infective and parasitic diseases	3.9
Respiratory diseases	2.6
Nervous system disorders	2.3
Digestive tract problems	1.1

Furthermore, relative to other districts in the northwestern Ontario region which also have large native populations, Kenora shows higher rates of hospitalization for specific illnesses:

	<u>Kenora</u>	<u>Sioux Lookout</u>	<u>Red Lake</u>
Infective and respiratory diseases	116.6	92.9	63.1
Upper respiratory diseases	199.7	185.3	182.7

These data were contained in an appendix to a letter from Dr. P. Connop to Chief Simon Fobister of February 20, 1978.

reserves nor the shared housing, medical, sanitation, or isolation conditions can, by themselves, account for the situation in Grassy Narrows. This community has the highest population-adjusted rate for the days of hospitalization for all illnesses in 1976, a rate which is almost 27% higher than the rate for five other Kenora-area Indian reserves combined.

Table I:12

DAYS OF HOSPITALIZATION FOR ALL ILLNESSES:  
LAKE OF THE WOODS HOSPITAL, 1976\*

<u>Area</u>	<u>No. Days</u>	<u>% of Total</u>	<u>Rate/1000 Pop.</u>
Five reserves in the Kenora area, excluding Grassy Narrows and Whitedog	3709	47.1%	3811.7
Grassy Narrows	2225	28.3%	5174.0
Whitedog	<u>1941</u>	<u>24.6%</u>	3278.7
	7875	100.0%	

Furthermore, Grassy Narrows has the highest rate of days of hospitalization per 1000 population for pneumonia and upper respiratory infections (Table I:13). Young persons in particular make up a large proportion of patients with respiratory problems.<sup>14</sup>

---

\*

Data Source: Analysis of data for Table I:12 based on information contained in the February 20, 1978 letter from Dr. Connop to Chief Fobister, with its attached appendices.

14

Out of a total of 868 separations from the Lake of the Woods Hospital in 1976, young persons age 0-14 accounted for almost half of all the cases.

Table I:13

DAYS OF HOSPITALIZATION FOR PNEUMONIA AND UPPER  
RESPIRATORY INFECTION:  
LAKE OF THE WOODS HOSPITAL, 1975\*

<u>Area</u>	<u>Rate/1000 Pop.</u>
Province of Ontario	31.8
Kenora District	132.7
Indian Reserves, except Grassy Narrows and Whitedog	986.1
Whitedog	1118.9
Grassy Narrows	1897.8

Grassy Narrows shows a much higher percentage of total cases of pneumonia recorded in 1976 among the age group 0-14 than the average figure for the Kenora region: 82.3% vs. 45.2%, respectively. Moreover, the figure for days of hospitalization for pneumonia and upper respiratory infection as a percentage of total days of hospitalization for the 0-14 age group in 1976 in Grassy Narrows is more than double the figure recorded for the region as a whole: 85.6% vs. 41.0%, respectively. Among other factors, this high incidence of respiratory problems among the young at Grassy Narrows is a reflection of the more general problem of child neglect in this community.

A very high incidence of heavy alcohol use in any population is a symptom that the society is in distress. The alcohol problem, however, is both a cause and an effect, for it has a profound influence on other aspects of well-being, like public health, the care of children, and the relationships among members of the community. It is often associated with crime and social disorder which is the subject of the next section.

---

\*

Data Source: Hugh Brody, "Social Impacts of the Loss of the Fishery", pp. 318-319.

### Public Disorder and Criminal Offences

In our own society, high crime rates are widely accepted as an indicator of deteriorating social conditions. Physical violence directed against persons or the destruction of property are crimes subject to not only moral disapproval and informal sanctions but also to certain rituals of process and procedure leading to judgment and retribution by the justice system. In the Indian community, however, the "law" is a "white man's law". Indian people do not share all the prevailing notions of what classes of events or behaviour constitute a crime or an offence against social order. In particular, they reject the concept of guilt and punishment for events and behaviour influenced by alcohol, and they grant little legitimacy to the plethora of regulations that fall under the Liquor Control Act of Ontario. Thus, problems arise when law-enforcement agencies apply their notions of law to people who do not believe that they are guilty, who are not condemned by members of their own community for their actions, and whose community actually regards the "white man's justice system" as an intrusion rather than protection of the community. Furthermore, the Indian people see that the denunciation, stigmatization, and sanctions attached to an act defined as a "crime" by the white society often stem not from the nature of the act itself, but from the nature of the individual who commits it. The law is applied selectively. The greater the social and economic worth of the individual, the more muted is society's condemnation of his actions. In the case of a person of low social value, an "offence" is simply a confirmation of his social worthlessness; in the case of an individual of prominent social status, an offence is an expression of his human fallibility.<sup>15</sup>

These observations qualify the interpretation of official statistics on criminal offences by Indian people in the Kenora area. The information produced by the police, the courts, and the government

---

<sup>15</sup>

This point is emphasized in the discussion of Indian-white relationships in Kenora, particularly with respect to the treatment of Indians by the town police. See Part II, pp. 198-199.

correctional service bureaucracies is relevant to the description of deteriorating social conditions on reserves; however, it must be interpreted as grounded in the interests, perspectives, and values of the dominant white society. The evidence of criminality and public disorder, in other words, is as much a reflection of the concerns of the white society as it is a record of actual threats to persons, property, or community.

On a more local level, moreover, the personalities of the persons assigned to a police detachment, court, or correctional services agency may influence which persons and acts will be processed by the justice system. The policies, organizational procedures, and resources of these institutions will all play a part in interpreting which problems and events will be considered threats to community life and safety. Furthermore, court statistics may be influenced by the responses of those charged, as well as by the presence and quality of the defence counsel and the inclination of the bench. All these factors have a bearing on the statistics that are produced on the extent of public order problems, and it goes without saying that these statistics only represent what has been placed on record, and not necessarily what exists. There is also reason to believe that official statistics tend to underestimate the extent of offences against the public order, since many occurrences of unlawful behaviour do not result in charges.<sup>16</sup>

The data on the incidence of criminal behaviour and other offences against the public order at Grassy Narrows must be considered in the context of what is happening in the region and in the Kenora area. In the light of what we know about the extent of alcoholism in the northwest region, it is not surprising that this part of the country has the highest overall rate of criminal and other public order offences in Ontario, and that over half of all charges laid by the police are for liquor offences. In the province as a whole, only 10% of all charges are

---

<sup>16</sup>

This is also the conclusion of the 1977 provincially-sponsored study on alcoholism in the northwest region. Giesbrecht and Brown, Alcohol Problems in Northwestern Ontario, p. 60.

for liquor offences. The Kenora District has the highest rate of increase of summary and indictable offences of any district in the province during the 1966-1972 period. Furthermore, it not only has the highest proportion of liquor offences against all charges laid by the police, but it also has the fastest growing rate of increase in liquor offences in the province.<sup>17</sup>

In the town of Kenora, 75% of all the charges made by the police in any single year are for liquor offences. On the average, about 82% of these offences are for displays of public drunkenness. Although information on the racial origin of persons charged by the town police is not available,<sup>18</sup> we do know that the vast majority (83%) of the people that the police send to the Kenora Detoxication Centre are of Indian origin.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, the majority of convictions handed down by the Kenora District

---

17

Liquor offences are offences charged under the Liquor Control Act (LCA) of Ontario. The most frequent liquor offence in the Kenora area is "Intoxication in a public place" (LCA 80-2). On the average, this offence constitutes about 80% of all charges under the Act. Other liquor offences, such as having or consuming liquor in an illegal place, selling liquor illegally, or drinking and driving, form a much smaller proportion of offences in the Kenora area than they do in the province as a whole.

The statistics on public order offences in the region and in the Kenora area are cited in Giesbrecht and Brown, Alcohol Problems in Northwestern Ontario, pp. 61-105.

18

Neither the police nor the court keep records on the racial origin of persons. Thus, it is not possible to compare native and non-native populations with respect to criminality. The ideal data series made up of charges or convictions by type of crime for each Indian community in the District as a proportion of total charges or convictions is simply nonexistent, and it is impossible to establish the relative position of Grassy Narrows vis-à-vis other Indian reserves and the non-native population of the town of Kenora.

19

The Kenora Detox Centre opened in September 1972 in response to protests by the residents of the town against the visibility of the alcohol problem (the "drunken Indians lying on the streets") that they believed was hurting the town's "image" and its tourist trade. Since the Centre opened, police have been taking Indian people there to "sober up".



Court are for liquor offences,<sup>20</sup> and most of the people committed to the Kenora jail are there for liquor offences.<sup>21</sup> It is common knowledge that native people, relative to their population in the area, are overrepresented in the inmate population of the Kenora jail.<sup>22</sup>

Against this background of offences documented for the Kenora area, it is not difficult to understand the types of problems that also characterize "lawlessness" within Indian communities. Prior to 1977, much of the heavy drinking by the people of Grassy Narrows took place in Kenora's bars, parks, and streets because the reserve was "dry" and no alcohol could be brought into the community except surreptitiously by bootleggers. Throughout the 1970's, therefore, persons from Grassy Narrows made up a substantial proportion of the total cases being processed by the

---

Between July 1973 and December 1975, 83% of all new admissions to the Centre were Indian people. An ever increasing share of admissions is now made up of recidivists, people who keep being re-admitted, and more and more of them are younger Indians. Over time, the number of people who come through the Detox Centre tends to fluctuate; for the 25 beds for males and the 15 beds for females, however, the Centre has handled from 6,648 persons in 1973 to 4,077 persons in 1975. Giesbrecht and Brown, Alcohol Problems in Northwestern Ontario, pp. 100-102.

20

Between 1966-1974, the average annual proportion of total convictions handed down by the Court made up of liquor offences was 66%, compared to a provincial annual average of only 12%. Again, "intoxication in a public place" was the prime offence, making up about 80% of all convictions by the Kenora court (only 45% for the province as a whole). Females were especially prominent in the statistics on liquor offences in the Kenora area. About 90% of all the convictions handed down to females by the Kenora court involved liquor offences; in the province as a whole, this proportion was less than 10%. Giesbrecht and Brown, p. 77, 103.

21

In the 1966-1974 period, the average annual proportion of people in jail who were there for liquor offences was 77% vs. the figure of 41% for Ontario. On a population-adjusted basis, the rate of committal to jail for liquor offences during this period was 49.0/1000 population for Kenora, vs. 1.5 for the province as a whole. The vast majority of females (90%) held by the Kenora jail are also there for liquor offences.

22

The process of "justice" as it is administered to an Indian person in Kenora approximates the following scenario: an Indian person is picked up by the police and charged with LCA 80-2 (intoxication in a public place). He is taken to the Detox Centre. The person stays there for a few hours

justice system, and formed a large proportion of all the convictions handed out for liquor offences.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the way in which the system deals with Indian offenders is best illustrated by the record of the Kenora court for one female from Grassy Narrows for the period April 1970 to March 1972. Such a typical "file" is reproduced as Table I:14. The pattern of binge drinking every two weeks or so (after paydays) is clearly manifest in this table; the predominance of offence LCA 80(2), intoxication in a public place, is also evident; and further, the alternation between fines and jail as "punishment" by the court is also representative of the disposition of "justice" to Indian people.

In 1975, a special detachment of the Ontario Provincial Police took up residence on a site adjacent to, but not on, reserve land. One police officer admitted that "Grassy Narrows...was a community out of control". With the stationing of a police force near the village, we begin to have a record of the occurrences of physical violence and other crimes against persons, damage to property, theft and similar offences. Not every occurrence results in a charge, however, because people are often reluctant to press charges against members of their own family.

---

or overnight and is released with a summons to appear in court. If the person goes to court and is found guilty of the offence as charged, he is given a fine, or a jail option in default of the fine. Often, the person will not appear in court, will be found guilty in absentia, and given two weeks to pay the fine or go to jail. Many people are repeatedly picked up, charged, taken to the Detox Centre, released, convicted, and fined. Some Indian people, particularly the women, do not mind going to jail. There they can have a shower, get clean clothing, meet their friends, receive a fair meal, and enjoy television in peace, away from the pressures of reserve life.

23

Despite the absence of comparative statistics on the contribution of Grassy Narrows to the Kenora crime and offence problem, there were a few occasions to discuss this question with persons in the justice system. From conversations with Ted Burton, the Crown Prosecutor, Ken Wilson, the Superintendent of the Ontario Provincial Police, Mrs. Cameron, the Administrator of the Criminal Court, and Chuck Wingfield, the Adult Probation Officer, it was clear that people from Grassy Narrows were well represented in police, court, and jail records. On a population-adjusted basis, some of the above persons thought that "Grassy Narrows was probably the worst reserve in the Kenora area."

Table I:14

A CASE STUDY: THE COURT RECORD OF OFFENCES AGAINST THE PUBLIC ORDER

(Band Member of Grassy Narrows, Female, 26 years old)

1970 - 1972

<u>Offence</u>	<u>Date Charged</u>	<u>Disposition</u>
80(2) LCA	11 April 1970	15.00 ttp C 7 days Apr 21*
"	21 April	Com 10 days cons. **
"	9 May	1 day time served
"	26 May	Com 10 Days
"	8 June	Com 14 Days
"	26 June	Com 10 Days
"	6 July	Com 10 days less 2
"	17 July	Com 10 days less 1
"	25 September	Com 7 days
"	3 October	Com 10 days
"	17 October	15.00 ttp C 7 days Nov. 26
"	19 October	Com 8 days
"	26 November	Com 7 days cons.
"	14 December	Com 5 days
"	4 January 1971	Com 8 days
"	20 January	Com 10 days
"	19 February	Com 10 days
"	4 March	Com 10 days
"	22 March	Com 10 days
"	5 April	Com 10 days
"	15 April	Com Vanier Inst. not exceeding 90 days
"	18 June	25.00 ttp C 6 days June 25
"	25 June	Com 10 days cons.
373-1 CCC	2 July	Discharged
42-1 LCA	16 July	Com 8 days
80-2 LCA	26 July	Com 8 days
"	30 July	Com 90 days
"	27 September	Com 5 days
"	4 October	30.00
"	22 October	25.00 ttp C Nov 15
68-2 LCA	15 November	Com 15 days cons.
133 CCC	19 November	3 months indef. sentence not to exceed 3 months
80-2 LCA	14 February 1972	Com 7 days
68-2 LCA	"	15.00 ttp Com Feb 14
"	25 February	Com 10 days
"	3 March	Com 10 days

Source: Records of the Kenora District Court, Kenora Ontario

\* Disposition is read as "to pay fine of \$15.00 with time to pay (ttp) 7 days, to April 21. \*\* Committed to 10 consecutive days in jail. CCC refers to the Criminal Code of Canada.

Nevertheless, the record of the number of occurrences in this small village of only 65 frame houses is quite startling. From Table I:15, we know that in the first ten months of 1977, the police were called 698 times to investigate some disturbance or threat to persons or property. It is difficult to imagine any other settlement of similar size where, on the average, police have to be involved in keeping order almost 70 times each month. Of course, at Grassy Narrows, the incidents of assault and other forms of violence are closely correlated with spree drinking among the adults. The incidents of theft, vandalism, and breaking and entering, for which young persons are usually responsible, are also associated with these "black" periods of heavy drinking. Thus, police activity in maintaining some semblance of control and restraint in the community is very extensive, but concentrated in time periods.

Table I:16 presents available data on the age, sex, and background of those persons who have been placed on probation by the judges of the district and provincial courts in Kenora. The records of the Adult Probation Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Correctional Services exclude, of course, those persons who have been sentenced to a penitentiary for more serious crimes like murder.

Comparative information on the extent of public order problems within Indian communities is generally not available.<sup>24</sup>

---

24

The Adult Probation Branch of the Ministry of Correctional Services does not keep records on a reserve-by-reserve basis. The data for Grassy Narrows, presented in Table I:16, was obtained by special request. Ms. Smith, of the Kenora office, prepared a list of all persons (with their names removed) who have been on probation since 1969. The list contained their age, sex, education, occupation, marital status, nature of the offence committed, previous offences (if any), and length of sentence. It also stated whether or not alcohol was involved in the offence.

Table I:15

CHARGES LAID BY THE ONTARIO PROVINCIAL POLICE AT GRASSY NARROWS

	<u>1975</u>	<u>1976</u>	<u>1977</u> (Jan-Oct)
Number of occurrences investigated	460	673	698
Number of charges laid	201	295	426
Liquor offences as a proportion of total charges laid	67%	67%	66%
Assault offences as a proportion of total charges laid	12%	11%	12%
All other charges (break & enter, theft, willful damage)	21%	22%	21%
Cases of homicide/murder - alcohol related	2	1	
Reports of gas sniffing by children age 8 - 14	4	11	3
Proportion of all charges accounted for by juveniles (under age 16)	7%	23%	28%

Source: Letter dated April 4, 1978 from K.E. Wilson, Superintendent of the Ontario Provincial Police in Kenora to Chief Simon Fobister.

In the above letter, Mr. Wilson summarizes the situation at Grassy Narrows in the following manner:

"From the above statistics, I am sure you can appreciate that the majority of the problems encountered by our personnel at Grassy Narrows is due to the over-consumption of alcohol, drug overdoses, and gasoline sniffing...Our personnel feel that gas sniffing is common to most children on the reserve, but in a number of instances, they are not being reported to the police....You will also note that the majority of people who are brought to the attention of the police are more often than not juveniles. I feel that the only way that this problem can be even partially resolved is by the education of the youth of the community in an effort to impress upon them the physical as well as the social damage they are doing to themselves."

Table I:16

ADULT PROBATION AT GRASSY NARROWS: 1969 - 1977

The following table examines the age, sex, and background of those persons who have received a sentence of probation from provincial and district judges of the Kenora court.

Of the total number placed on probation during the 1969-1977 period, 27 were male; 13 female. The average age of the males was 24.5 years; that of the females was 24.0 years.

Nature of Offences for which Persons Placed on Probation

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Assault Causing Bodily Harm	11	50.0%
Common Assault	9	
Break, Enter, and Theft	7	17.5%
Use/Possession of a Dangerous Firearm	5	12.5%
Mischief/Damage/Causing a Disturbance	4	10.0%
Manslaughter	3	7.5%
Causing a Fire by Negligence	1	2.5%
	<u>40</u>	<u>100.0%</u>

Alcohol was involved in 29 (73%) of all the above offences.

Age Distribution of Persons Placed on Probation

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
16 - 19 years	14	35.0%
20 - 24 years	8	20.0%
25 - 29 years	8	20.0%
30 - 34 years	3	22.5%
35 - 40 years	6	
Age Unknown	1	2.5%
	<u>40</u>	<u>100.0%</u>

Of those persons placed on probation during the above period, 47.5% had no previous offences on record. Over a third, however, (37.5%) had previous liquor offences on record. The remainder (15%) had committed some offence other than liquor.

---

Source: Ministry of Correctional Services, Adult Probation Branch.

Around Kenora, it is well known that until the late 1960's, criminal offences committed by the people of Grassy Narrows were few and far between. Chuck Wingfield, who served in the office of Adult Probation in Kenora for over twenty years, said in an interview that his office,

"...never had any problems with the Indian people from Grassy Narrows until the government moved them to that new reserve. That's when the problems really started....

Now our case load from Grassy Narrows of adults on probation is one of the heaviest in the region and of course, everything is tied up with alcohol abuse." 25

In terms of actual occurrences of crime, one set of data which compares three reserves in the Kenora area shows that Grassy Narrows has a substantially higher incidence of crime per 1000 population than the Shoal Lake Indian reserve, which is similar to Grassy Narrows in many respects.<sup>26</sup>

Aside from crimes against persons and property committed by adults, there has been a dramatic increase at Grassy Narrows in the number of crimes committed by persons under the age of 16. This increase is well documented in the records of the police since 1975, and in the records of the Probation Service Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services. The data are presented in Table I:18. "Juvenile crime" is particularly associated with willful damage to property, break and enter, and theft. Almost two-thirds of those sentenced to probation are children 12 to 15 years old. These facts are summarized in Table I:19.

---

25

Interview with Chuck Wingfield in Kenora, October 20, 1977.

26

The Shoal Lake reserve was used as a control community in a study of the social and economic effects of mercury poisoning on the two reserves of Whitedog and Grassy Narrows. Shoal Lake is similar to Grassy Narrows in terms of population size; both communities share a similar history of government intervention, although Shoal Lake has never been relocated. In Table I:17, it is noteworthy that Whitedog has a substantially higher incidence of occurrences of crime than Shoal Lake. Table I:17 is found in Hugh Brody, "Social Impacts of the Loss of the Fishery," p. 339.

Table I:17

OCCURRENCES OF CRIME PER 1000 POPULATION: 1976

<u>Type of Crime</u>	<u>Grassy Narrows</u>	<u>Whitedog</u>	<u>Shoal Lake</u>
Assault causing bodily harm	420.4	266.7	121.7
Crimes against other persons	14.2	16.2	7.9
Breaking and entering	128.3	126.1	76.7
Willful damage to property	133.0	169.4	55.5
Theft	187.6	129.7	121.7

It should be noted that in 1978, for example, the number of children on probation for criminal acts constituted almost one-third of the entire population of children in the community between age eight and fifteen. Not one child on the list of probationers came from a non-drinking family; all of them came from among the heaviest drinking families on the reserve. The data in Tables I:18 and I:19 provide yet another window into the progressive deterioration of the social fabric of Grassy Narrows.

Statistics alone cannot convey the full import of what is happening to the children in Grassy Narrows. The words "assault" and "break and enter", which are official designations of categories of crime, connote little of the intensity of feeling that finds expression in such acts of violence. It is especially significant, moreover, that in recent years there has been a marked qualitative change in the nature of juvenile crime. In the first place, the damage to community buildings and facilities has become much more extensive. Over a period of only four months during the 1979-1980 winter, the cost of repairs to community property that had been vandalized by children under age 16 was estimated at well over \$40,000.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup>

Notes from a conversation with Chief Simon Fobister, January 20, 1980.



Table I:18

JUVENILE OFFENCES AND JUVENILE PROBATION AT GRASSY NARROWS

The Record of the Ontario Provincial Police

- 1975 Juveniles accounted for only 7% of the total charges at Grassy Narrows. However, young persons under 16 accounted for all the break and enter charges.
- 1976 23% of all charges were laid against juveniles. Young persons accounted for all the willful damage charges and all the break and enter charges.
- 1977 (January to October only)  
Juveniles accounted for 28% of all the charges laid at Grassy Narrows. Juveniles were responsible for: 96% of all the break and enter charges; 100% of all the theft charges; 66% of all the offensive weapons charges; 89% of all the willful damage charges; and, 11% of all the liquor offences.

The police also report that gas sniffing, which is not an offence under the law but which is extremely destructive to the central nervous system, has increased dramatically among young children at Grassy Narrows, particularly since 1975. Many incidents are not reported to the police.

The Record of Juvenile Probation

	<u>1972</u>	<u>1973</u>	<u>1974</u>	<u>1975</u>	<u>1976</u>	<u>1977</u>
Number of Children on Probation	17	11	5	20	19	27
No. of Children Completed Probation	17	8	6	6	12	9
Cumulative Net Increase in No. of Children on Probation	0	3	2	16	23	41
Number of Children with Previous Record of Offences/Probation	7	2	2	8	6	6
Children Sent to Training School*				3	7	2

---

\* Records of children sent to training school for committing serious offences are kept only for a period of three years. Almost all the children who are sent to such institutions have been on probation before, and have a record of previous offences.

Data Source: Ontario Provincial Police, Grassy Narrows detachment; Probation and After-Care Branch, Children's Services Division, the Ministry of Community and Social Services of Ontario.

Table I:19

JUVENILE OFFENDERS AT GRASSY NARROWS: 1972-1977

The following table examines the age, sex, and offences committed by children between age 8 and 15 who have been charged, convicted, and sentenced to probation by the judges of the Kenora Court.

The total number of young offenders placed on probation during the 1972-1977 period was 99 children; 73 were male, and 26 were female. The average age of the "juvenile offender" was 12.1 years.

Nature of Offences for which Children Sentenced to Probation

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Break, Enter, and Theft	74	62.6%
Theft	28	
Willful Damage	26	16.0%
Minors Consuming Alcohol/Intoxi- cation in a Public Place	21	13.0%
Mischief/Unlawfully in Dwelling	6	8.4%
Assault	2	
Use of Dangerous Firearm	2	
Criminal Negligence	1	
All Other Charges (Causing a Dis- turbance, Breach of Probation)	3	
	163	100.0%

Age Distribution of Young Offenders

	<u>Number</u>	
8 years old	2	7.1%
9 years old	5	
10 years old	16	29.3%
11 years old	13	39.4%
12 years old	21	
13 years old	18	24.2%
14 years old	10	
15 years old	14	100.0%
	99	

---

Source: Ministry of Community and Social Services, Children's Services Division, Probation and After-Care Service Branch.

In the second place, private property of non-Indian persons was once considered "out of bounds" for destruction; it is so no longer. During the same winter, three boys under 15 years of age burned down a tourist lodge on Grassy Narrows Lake. The houses of the teachers of the Grassy Narrows school have also become targets for ruin. In the space of two months, young people went on a rampage of teachers' residences twelve times. The kind of wholesale destruction that takes place in a case of "break and enter" is best illustrated by an example. The following incident is taken from notes in my diary.<sup>28</sup>

On the evening of January 17, 1980, I stopped by Peggy's house. The hinge of her back door was broken; the screens of her kitchen windows were ripped apart. Pushing the door open, I stepped into a mass of garbage, broken glass, and earth from the plants that had been pulled out by their roots. Peggy's clothing was also lying there, stained heavily with grape juice and mud. As I manoevered my way into the house, I saw about seven or eight children jump from her front door into the snowbank below. One child about ten years old was left behind.

The house looked as if it had been hit by a tidal wave. Everything that could have possibly been broken was lying in pieces on the floor. Peggy had an Indian foster child with her; all her toys were destroyed. The stereo equipment was broken and all the records had been smashed; the pictures on the wall, smashed; her collection of china dolls, smashed. Garbage and all her clothing were scattered on the floor amid empty beer bottles and broken glass. Cans of grape juice had been thrown against the wall until they burst. In the bedrooms, all the closets and dressers had been emptied of their contents and trampled. The walls were covered with graffiti written with lipstick and magic markers. Dirt from her plants littered her bed, her furniture, and the floor.

In the kitchen, a similar sight. The children had drunk beer and liquor, sniffed magic markers, and eaten raw frozen vegetables, raw bacon, raw meat, everything that could be eaten. Someone had drank her Ten-O-Six facial astringent mixed with milk.

Next day, it took six people working steadily for five hours to bring order from the chaos. There was a moment of relief when Peggy's camera was found in the snow.

In addition to more serious crimes against property, there is yet another disturbing element in the recent pattern of violence carried out by young persons. During the 1979-1980 winter, children burned down the house of their grandmother. In a separate incident, a fifteen-year old boy held his entire family hostage with a loaded shotgun. He narrowly missed killing a Band Constable and was finally smoked out of the house by tear gas. The year before, on the first day of the winter carnival, a young boy shot one of his younger brothers through the heart and fatally wounded another brother in the head. He critically injured his third brother by a shotgun blast through the chest, and ripped off the hand of a girl that was spending the weekend with the family. By the end of that morning, two young people were dead; one was near death; and one was badly wounded. These examples of violence speak to the intensity with which young persons are turning their rage against members of their own family, particularly against those who are even more helpless than themselves. Surely this is a sign of deepening crisis among the young and within the Indian family. The children who repeatedly get into trouble say that "no one cares for them". They pass from childhood to adolescence without guidance and without love. Gone are the elaborate rituals of puberty and transition that were still practiced on the old reserve.<sup>29</sup> To substitute for the family, the children organize themselves into "gangs". Unfortunately, the leadership of these gangs is almost never benevolent because

---

29

See the discussion of these rituals in chapter 5, "Life Cycle Rituals and Identity, pp. 127-135.

the leaders also come from alcoholic families and they copy the behaviour of the adults.<sup>30</sup>

Residents of the community have different interpretations of the roots of the problem with the young. The white teachers, who are recent victims of the violence, blame the vandalism on "the system" of economics and "the system" of justice, both of which offer no disincentives for juvenile crime.

"At Grassy Narrows, the kids see their parents getting everything for nothing; the government provides welfare money; the government provides jobs; the government gives houses free. There's no rationale not to get into trouble, and some good reasons to do exactly the opposite. Why keep your house in good shape when you can break the windows during the summer, and then get paid during the winter to put them back in the house? Why keep the siding on the Band store when maybe your father will get the job of putting the siding back on, and he'll get a fat paycheck, and maybe you'll get a new pair of jeans out of it?

---

30

In the youngest female "gang" on the reserve during the period of my residency there, the leader was known to force her adherents to sniff gas. She would not sniff gasoline herself, however, but used this "ritual" to assert her power over the members of the group. Anyone who refused to do her bidding would get beaten up and expelled from the group. Of the twenty or so children under her command, all were under the age of eleven.

The male "gangs" on the reserve were responsible for a number of incidents of rape of girl children, following the pattern of gang-rape that takes place during "adult" drinking parties. In the first few months of 1980, a twelve-year old girl was raped by four members of a gang, age 12 to 14. She was also so badly beaten that she had to be rushed to the hospital in Kenora. Later, in April, another group of boys gang-raped a ten-year old girl. These incidents are usually not reported to the police and thus do not show up on police records of "juvenile crime".

It is important to remember that in a community where children belonging to alcoholic families have neither emotional nor physical security, membership in a "gang" is the only alternative to indifference and maltreatment at the hands of adults. It is a common sight at Grassy Narrows to see children huddled together like orphans seeking warmth, companionship, and direction from others not much older than themselves. When the families are drinking, these children band together. They roam around the reserve all night if necessary, waiting until the adults lose consciousness. At that point, they will slip back into the house and finish the bottles of liquor. I have seen children five and six years old in an intoxicated state swaying from one side of the road to another at two or three o'clock in the morning.

Why not wreck the school? Somebody will fix it. You won't get into trouble for it; you may go to court, but then maybe your mom will finally buy you a new shirt so that you'll look nice in front of the judge...

And there's no punishment. Now the judges decided to give community work orders to the kids, but so far, out of approximately 50 work orders handed out, not one has been enforced. Nobody on the reserve wants to take the trouble to supervise them. Sometimes you think that the Band really doesn't care about the kids and the vandalism. For example, last winter (1979) the kids destroyed their own skating rink. Just demolished it. The Band didn't press charges, so the police couldn't do anything either. The same thing happened when the gangs got into the school and smashed up several classrooms. No charges. No punishment. And probation is just a joke."<sup>31</sup>

Some children, however, work out their powerlessness to change things by using violence and vandalism as a means to an end. The route of escape from the intolerable conditions of reserve life is through crime.

"Young Jordan Taymenopay [pseudonym], for example. He would get high on gasoline and then come into the school to destroy what he could. Then he would go to the police and say, 'I did it. Now get me out of this reserve.' But the police weren't smart enough to do that. So Jordan broke into the school five times before they had enough and the judge finally ordered him to be sent to training school.

It gets so desperate for the kids here at Grassy Narrows that sometimes they just have to get out for a while. Like Jordan. He just went crazy after his sister Judy killed herself with an overdose of tuberculosis pills. Even the kids in grades three and four say they 'want out'.

The fact is that there's hardly a family on this reserve that hasn't got some tragedy to live down. We know children that say they would rather die than live at Grassy Narrows."<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Leslie Fraser and Peggy Halcrow, January 20, 1980.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

Within the Indian community, no blame is attached to acts of violence committed by children. John Beaver, who is a man in his late sixties, was beaten so viciously by a gang of children that he required hospitalization. Yet even he did not press charges. He simply said that he was very ashamed that the old way of life had gone, "because this would never have happened on the old reserve...the kids, they had been drinking, and when a person is drinking, he is not himself."<sup>33</sup> Band members recognize that juvenile crime is itself both a symptom of a community in a state of crisis, and an effect of the disintegration of the Indian family. Steve Fobister, who was the Probation Officer for young people at Grassy Narrows, defines the problem:

"There are children on this reserve who are twelve years old, and already they have a long list of criminal offences on their record. They are not to blame. They are the victims of neglect. Their parents should be charged with neglect by your justice system, but they are not...Everything here is related to alcoholism. The children, they suffer for the sins of their parents."<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> John Beaver, January 21, 1980.

<sup>34</sup> Steve Fobister, date of interview unrecorded.

### Failure to Thrive

It is a truism that the basic drive of all organisms is towards growth. Man and the single cell, both reach out to affect their environment, to transform energy and matter into life-facilitating processes, to extend the self, and to survive and improve on capacities for becoming. In man, the code for living and growing is handed down genetically and culturally, for human cultures determine the growth of a people within them just as surely as organisms pattern the growth of their cells. A healthy human society is one which has the capacity to provide each new generation with the possibilities for growth. It is a society which encourages learning and discovery, curiosity and creativity, because through these processes each generation contributes to the advancement of the people as a whole.

One of the signals of a society in disarray is the failure of an entire generation to learn and to realize inherited potentialities for the development of the intellect and the spirit. Grassy Narrows is a community where the vast majority of the young are thwarted in the drive for growth. Children and young people cannot get from the environment the basic materials necessary for physical and mental nourishment. The majority of adults seem to have lost their capacity to care for the physical survival of their offspring, and the society as a whole seems to have abdicated its responsibility for the intellectual formation of succeeding generations.

The following statistics on educational achievement at Grassy Narrows provide compelling evidence that the young people of the community are demonstrating a "failure to thrive" to the standards of the dominant society. The Gordian knot of this condition is that the children are caught in a hiatus between two cultures. No longer are they taught the skills of the traditional land-based way of life. Most of them do not know how to trap or hunt or to survive in the bush. They receive very little training from the elders on the moral and symbolic rudiments of the culture that once was communicated through stories and legends. The young today have been disinherited from the accumulated



knowledge of the Indian culture held by the older generation. At the same time, they have become subjected to a system of education that seems to be an anomaly in the context of reserve life. As a result, the young can thrive in neither the old world nor the new, and they are effectively trapped in a vicious circle of stunted growth and lack of opportunity for learning and discovery.

Table I:20 presents a record of school attendance during the 1977-78 year. So many children attend school so irregularly that they are unable to pass from one grade to another in any normal progression. Ultimately, they just "drop out" permanently at the level of grade four or five. It is hard to imagine any non-native community where almost half (46%) of the entire population of school-age children drops out of school in any given school year because of poor attendance.<sup>35</sup>

Band members say explicitly that absenteeism and the educational failure of children are intimately connected with parental alcoholism and the deterioration in family life:

"The kids don't go to school because their parents are too busy drinking and the kids are not taken care of properly. I was that way too when I was drinking. We never had time to wash the kids' clothes; we never made sure that they got up in time for school....If the children managed to get to school by themselves, that was good; when they got home, though, they forgot what they've been taught because the home was a wreck, or maybe there was nobody home, and also nothing to eat....

---

35

This percentage is derived from the number of children who have dropped out of school (56) plus the number of children who were not registered in school (18) during the 1977-78 academic year, over the total number of children of school age (161). The information is based on the 1977 survey of households and on school registration and attendance records.

And another thing. If you're drinking all night, then you sleep in the daytime. If there's drinking in the house, the kids don't go to sleep...they have to sleep in the daytime too; so how can they go to school? And if the parents are drinking, the older children have to take care of the young ones, and to beg for food if there is none at home. They can't go to school with those kinds of responsibilities....

I know about these things, because I used to be a heavy drinker. Since I quit drinking this year, my children have clean clothes; they're in school, and the only time they're not in school is when they're sick."<sup>36</sup>

Statistically, out of the 34 families at Grassy Narrows to which all the "drop-out" children belong, 30 are "drinking families".<sup>37</sup>

The cumulative impact of the annual drop-out rate in this community, as illustrated by the 1977-78 school records, can be seen in data on grade progression during the decade of the 1970's. In schools across Canada, most educators think in terms of a "cohort" or a "class" of students that starts school together and moves through grades together. At Grassy Narrows, since the federal day school opened on the new reserve in 1971-72, it is difficult to think in terms of a "cohort" because the majority of children do not move from grade to grade in any regular progression. An exhaustive study of the grade progress of each of the 311 students enrolled in the school from 1971-72 to 1978-79 revealed an educational reality distinguished by failure, repetition of grades, and ultimate discouragement from learning. The documentation of this lack of educational achievement is presented in Table I:21.

---

<sup>36</sup>

Interview with John Fobister, April 10, 1979.

<sup>37</sup>

Of all the families who have children who do not attend school regularly, only four families abstain from alcohol or drink only on special occasions. In two of the three families who do not drink at all, the children are having great difficulties in grades three or four because the parents used to drink heavily until the year 1977, when they joined the Alcoholics Anonymous group on the reserve. In the other non-drinking family, the child is simply a slow learner and does not want to go to school.

Table I:20

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AT GRASSY NARROWS: 1977-1978

The following data show that a significant percentage of children, in some cases the majority in any one class, is "dropping out" of school. A child who has missed more than 70 school days out of a school year of 170 days has effectively "dropped out" of the class. In many cases, children miss more than 100 days of school in any one year.

Such poor attendance virtually guarantees that a child will fall further and further behind in terms of grade progression. If a child never fully masters the basic concepts of language and the basic arithmetic skills that are normally learned in kindergarten and grades 1 through 3, the child becomes discouraged by the requisite repetition of lower grades and usually terminates school permanently by grade 4 or 5.

The situation in each grade for the 1977-78 school year is summarized below:

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Class Size</u>	<u>No. "Dropouts"</u>	<u>No. of "Dropouts" as a Percent of the Class</u>
Kindergarten	20	10	50%
Grade 1	16	3	18%
Grade 2	24	7	29%
Grade 3	17	9	53%
Grade 4	17	7	41%
Grades 5 to 8	24	10	42%
Grades 4 to 6 (Special class)	25	10	40%

The years 15 to 19, moreover, are normally the years of intense preparation in a person's life for a career or a chosen line of work. These are the years of high school and training for a productive working life. At Grassy Narrows, in 1977-78, out of 69 young people in the 15-19 age group, only 9 were enrolled in high school, and 4 of the 9 dropped out of high school by the end of the first quarter.

The overall pattern is easily discernible in the following summary:

Of the 17 persons on reserve, age 15, 11 were still in school;  
Of the 15 persons on reserve, age 16, only 6 were still in school;  
Of the 20 persons on reserve, age 17, only 5 were still in school;  
Of the 9 persons on reserve, age 18, none were in school; and,  
Of the 8 persons on reserve, age 19, only two were in high school.

---

Source: School attendance records, Grassy Narrows Federal Elementary School.

Table I:21 tells the following story: of the total of 117 students that entered kindergarten during the seven-year period, 1971-72 to 1978-79 (cohorts A to G), only 19 children (16%) passed every year and were registered in the grade appropriate to their age. Of a cohort of 37 students enrolled in grade one in 1971-72 (cohort H) only two children (5%) made it to grade eight, eight years later. A ray of hope is observed for the first time in the 1978-79 school year (cohort G) when twelve children, out of a class of 19, progress from kindergarten to grade one.<sup>38</sup>

The table does not show the grade progression of those students whose educational record was so erratic that they could not be classified into cohorts at all. Of the 107 children who fall into this category and who were registered in the school at some point during the decade, only eleven (10%) achieved partial grade progression. Most of these children belong to the heaviest drinking families on the reserve. Often they miss years of school because they have to look after younger siblings at home.

The evidence presented so far indicates the extent of the "failure to thrive" as measured by the records of educational achievement during the decade of the 1970's. Less than one-fifth of the entire population of children enrolled at the Grassy Narrows elementary school achieve regular grade progression. Almost one-quarter of the children are one year behind their expected grade level. Nearly one-fifth are two years behind, and one-tenth are three and four years behind the expected grade level. The norm for the community of Grassy Narrows is grade repetition, discouragement, and early retirement from school at the lower grades.<sup>39</sup>

---

38

Marguerite Raslack, the kindergarten teacher, attributes the progress in grade progression observed in her 1978-79 class to the fact that several families stopped drinking in 1978 and joined the Alcoholics Anonymous group on the reserve. Participation of the parents in the AA group is always accompanied by a substantial decrease in absenteeism.

39

Data indicate that about 40% of all the children who enter kindergarten in the Grassy Narrows school repeat their kindergarten year at least once. About 12% of children spend three years in kindergarten. About 30% of all children repeat grade one and grade two. The rates of grade repetition diminish for higher grades simply because fewer students reach these grades. Most drop out at grade four or five.

Table I:21

GRADE PROGRESSION AND ACHIEVEMENT OF STUDENTS AT THE GRASSY NARROWS

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: 1971-1979

In March, 1979 an Education Cohort Analysis Study for the Grassy Narrows federal school was commissioned by the Chief and Band Council. The purpose of the study was to determine the record of achievement of pupils over a period of eight years, 1971-1979. The main source of information was the register of daily attendance for each of the school years in the above period.

From data contained in the register, one can determine the grade progress (or lack of progress) for each student enrolled in the school. When this is done on the basis of the classes, or cohorts of pupils, all with birthdates in the same calendar year, it is possible to evaluate the relative rates of progression, and to compare the actual level of grade achievement with the expected level based on a regular annual grade progression. Shortfalls due to grade repetition can then be calculated in terms of the number of school years behind normal grade progression.

The following statistics are representative of the key findings of the Education Cohort Analysis study. They show conclusively that an extremely small percentage of students, in any given cohort, is able to make regular grade progress. Cohorts are not maintained because of very high levels of grade repetition, school absences sometimes of a year or more, and early school retirement ("drop outs"). The following summary table indicates, for each cohort examined in greater detail on page 55, the number and percentage of pupils who achieved the expected grade level for 1978-79, and the number and percentage of pupils who dropped out of school.

<u>Cohort</u>	<u>Expected Grade</u>	<u>Cohort Size</u>	<u>No. and % of Students Achieved Expected Grade</u>		<u>No. and % of Cohort Dropouts</u>	
A	grade 7	15	1	(7%)	3	(20%)
B	grade 6	16	0	(0%)	2	(13%)
C	grade 5	23	1	(4%)	3	(13%)
D	grade 4	20	1	(5%)	5	(25%)
E	grade 3	13	2	(16%)	3	(23%)
H	grade 8	37	2	(5%)	16	(43%)

In every case, the number (and percent) of children who drop out of school permanently before ever reaching the expected grade level far exceeds the number and percent of children who make it through to their expected grade.

Table I:21 (Continued)

<u>Cohort</u>	<u>Year Started Kindergarten</u>	<u>Expected Grade Level in 1978-79</u>	<u>Class Size</u>	<u>No. Students Who Achieved Expected Grade</u>	<u>No. Students One Grade Below Expected Grade</u>	<u>No. Students Two Grades Behind</u>	<u>No. Students Three or More Grades Behind</u>	<u>Number Transfers</u>	<u>Retirements</u>
A	1971-1972	grade 7	15	1	2	5	3	1	3
B	1972-1973	grade 6	16	none	2	2	7	3	2
C	1973-1974	grade 5	23	1	5	9	3	2	3
D	1974-1975	grade 4	20	1	5	5	-	4	5
E	1975-1976	grade 3	13	2	5	-	-	3	3
F	1977-1978	grade 2	11	2	4	-	-	3	2
G	1978-1979	grade 1	19	12	4	-	-	3	-
H	Enter grade 1 in 1971-72 school year	grade 8	37	2	3	5	8	3	16
A Plus Join Cohort A in grade 1 in 1972-73		grade 7	9	none	2	1	-	-	6
B Plus Join Cohort B in grade 1 in 1973-74		grade 6	8	1	1	1	-	-	5
H Plus Join Cohort H in grade 2 in 1972-73		grade 8	13	2	2	1	-	1	7

Source: Johanna Veldstra, "Education Cohort Analysis 1971 - 1979 for the Grassy Narrows Federal Elementary School," unpublished manuscript, March 1979.

This extraordinary waste of human potential brings no cries of protest from the larger society, yet it is difficult to imagine any non-native community that would tolerate such a situation. Although detailed information on school achievement in Ontario does not exist in a form that would make comparison with Grassy Narrows possible, it is nevertheless true that in Ontario schools grade failure is relatively rare, cohorts are the rule, and grade repetition is an exceptional occurrence.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, students with learning difficulties are removed from regular classrooms and placed in special education classes. The attention and priority given to learning in the dominant society have no parallel in the Grassy Narrows community. Part of the problem is, of course, that the very structure of the reserve economy offers little incentive for young people to break out of the vicious cycle of stunted intellectual growth. Alan Raslack, who teaches the senior class at the Grassy Narrows school, has not been able to shepherd one student into high school in the last three years not for want of teaching ability, effort, or determination. He maintains that:

"One of the basic problems in education at Grassy Narrows is that there's no pat on the back for success, and no negative feeling about failure. There's no incentive to go to high school. From the kids' point of view, they see that none of their friends are going to high school. They see their parents on welfare. They know that when they turn 16, they can go on welfare, or get a job, work for six months, and collect unemployment insurance just like everybody else. Getting an education at Grassy Narrows is an ambition that is soon exhausted because it cannot attach itself to any role or function in this society."<sup>41</sup>

---

40

The administrator of the Kenora Board of Education, who was asked for comparative information, said that statistics on grade progression, repetition, absenteeism, and retirement are unavailable for two reasons: first, there have been no requests for this type of information; and second, school boards are financially unable to engage in such detailed research as would be required to determine average and median grade repetition rates and absenteeism levels. He confirmed, however, that the "norm" for Ontario schools is not distinguished by grade failure, repetition, and early retirement.

41

Alan Raslack, notes from a conversation on education at Grassy Narrows, January 19, 1980.

Some families at Grassy Narrows do realize that the future of the entire community is at stake if the trend of learning failure continues. They are calling for urgent remedial action but their voices, so far, have gone unheeded by the Department of Indian Affairs.<sup>42</sup>

The crux of the problem is that the majority of the adults in their child-bearing and child-rearing years are themselves caught in the hiatus between two cultures. The heavy drinkers in this group are the ones that give their children no encouragement to develop intellectually; they often deprive them of food, shelter, and clothing; sometimes they abandon them. In the end, they condemn the next generation to entrapment in the same hiatus between two worlds.

---

42

Many people in the community are calling for an Indian-run boarding school off the reserve, to let the children learn while the community itself has time to heal from the pervasive effects of alcohol abuse. The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) has not responded to the challenge to reverse the dismal record of educational failure.



### Child Neglect, Abuse, and Abandonment

An apparent discontinuity in the ability of human beings to care for their offspring, to nurture their young spiritually and emotionally, and to protect and ensure their physical survival is a powerful indicator of a society in crisis. In the description of this particular facet of community life at Grassy Narrows, it is difficult to know where to begin and how to tell the story. Furthermore, the account of breakdown in the responsibility of parents for their children cannot be entirely objective because anyone who has lived at Grassy Narrows for an extended period of time builds up a reservoir not only of knowledge gained from the witnessing of events, but of cold anger provoked by adults who seem to have lost their humanity.

The easiest way to begin is to present the "official" statistics with respect to child neglect as it is dealt with by a government agency. The Children's Aid Society (C.A.S.) is the agency that intervenes in cases of serious child neglect or abuse. The C.A.S. takes the neglected or abused child into its care until the court decides whether the child should be returned to its parents, temporarily placed in a foster home, or permanently assigned to the status of a "ward" of the state. According to the records of the C.A.S. of the District of Kenora, Grassy Narrows has the highest number of children in the care of foster homes of any Indian reserve in the entire region. In 1977, out of a total of 108 children taken into care by the C.A.S. social workers from ten Indian reserves around Kenora, 56 children (or 52% of the total) came from Grassy Narrows. Evidence of the extraordinary incidence of child neglect in this community, as measured by the number of children that have to be taken into care, is presented in Table I:22.

Table I:22 also gives some evidence of the characteristic conditions, as identified by C.A.S. social workers, that give rise to a situation where children are removed from their parents by the intervention of the state.

Table I:22

CHILDREN IN CARE AT GRASSY NARROWS: 1973-1977

<u>Reserve*</u>	<u>Number of Children in Care of Children's Aid</u>				
	<u>1973</u>	<u>1974</u>	<u>1975</u>	<u>1976</u>	<u>1977</u>
Grassy Narrows	98	61	97	48	56
Whitedog	80	34	48	32	37
Whitefish Bay	16	21	24	data not available	
Shoal Lake	11	15	6	"	"

Reasons for Being Taken into Care: Grassy Narrows, 1972 - 1977

<u>Reason</u>	<u>No. Children</u>	<u>% of Total</u>
Desertion or Abandonment (related to alcoholism)	79	31%
Alcoholism of parents	60	23%
Parental neglect (related to alcoholism)	48	19%
Behaviour problems of child	20	8%
Parent ill/disabled	16	6%
Overcrowded housing	14	5%
Child ill/disabled	11	4%
All other reasons (marital conflict of parents, lack of income, emotional rejection of child)	<u>11</u>	<u>4%</u>
	259	100%

Source: Data provided by the Children's Aid Society of the District of Kenora with accompanying letter from G.E. Norris, Executive Director to Chief Fobister, March 29, 1978.

\* The C.A.S. does not normally keep records on a reserve by reserve basis, so comparative data are scarce. Furthermore, records are only kept for five years.

Whereas certain conditions like parental/child illness, overcrowded housing, lack of income, or even the behavioural problems of a child, are likely to be statistically common to native and non-native communities alike, the specific reasons of parental alcoholism, desertion, and neglect point to "social pathology" and derangement in family life. At Grassy Narrows, 73% of all the children that are taken into care are apprehended for reasons of desertion or neglect caused by parental alcoholism. These children are the victims and the manifestations of a society in a state of social and cultural disarray.

On a population-adjusted basis for 1975 (the last year for which comparative data are available), a comparison of children in care for four Indian reserves reveals a figure for Grassy Narrows that is dramatically higher than that for any of the other communities.

Table I:23

NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN CARE PER 1000 POPULATION: 1975\*

<u>Reserve</u>	<u>Children in Care/1000 Pop.</u>
Grassy Narrows	22.5
Whitedog	8.1
Whitefish Bay	5.5
Shoal Lake	3.4

Indeed, the figure for Grassy Narrows is almost three times as high as the figure for Whitedog, and four and six times as high as the figures for Whitefish Bay and Shoal Lake, respectively.

Helpful as the statistics are in outlining the extent of child neglect as it is dealt with by the Children's Aid Society, they reveal partially the depth of the crisis in the care of the young at Grassy Narrows. Only a small proportion of the actual cases of neglect find their way into C.A.S. files. In recent years, moreover, fiscal restraint

---

\*

Data source: As in Table I:22, but adjusted for population.

and budget cutbacks have necessitated reductions in C.A.S. staff and operating costs. Social workers are reluctant to add to their case load, and try to deal with only very extreme cases of neglect. According to the teachers and the day care center supervisor at Grassy Narrows, the C.A.S. social workers barely touch the surface of the problem:

"I would say that most of the children on this reserve are very poorly taken care of, and over half are really neglected from the point of view of their physical well-being.

It has something to do with the fact that at the age of about four, the mother suddenly cuts the child off from care. I have seen a mother completely change her attitude to a child...she will protect and nourish the baby, and this is related to the fact that here, mothers breastfeed their babies longer than in our own culture (sometimes until the children are three years old). Then suddenly, at some point, she will no longer protect the child. From that point on, the kids are on their own. They have to fend for themselves. The parents leave them to do what they want to do -- to fall asleep wherever they can, to eat whatever they can find, and so on. Even the parents that don't drink that much, even they have no concept of putting the child to bed at a certain time, or having a meal at a certain time, or knowing where the child is.

Probably all this is related to traditional childrearing patterns. In the old way of life, there was always a great deal of flexibility with regard to 'eating at a certain time' or 'sleeping at a certain time'. You ate when you were hungry, and went to sleep when you were sleepy. The women used to prepare the kind of food that could be eaten whenever anyone was hungry: fish chowder, meat stew, things that would sit on the wood stove all day long.

The big difference on this reserve is that women no longer prepare this kind of food, yet they don't feed their children either. They buy cans of spaghetti, cans of meat stew, Kraft macaroni dinners, and a lot of junk food. The adults will eat, but very few people sit down to the supper table as a family. The children have to fend for themselves. If there are any groceries left,

the kids will make a hole in the can of spaghetti and put the can on the stove, or they will eat the food cold. Most of the time, they will live on potato chips, candy, and coke -- things they can buy at the store.

This 'new way of life' places a terrible strain on the children of alcoholic families, because often there are no 'groceries' to be eaten, and no place to sleep. So you will see very small children wandering around the reserve at night. They are hungry, helpless, and sad. Little Wanda [pseudonym], for example, she's only five years old. She's a ragamuffin...she has no 'home'. She has only her older brothers and sisters to protect her. They get the food and if there is no food at home, they will break and enter and steal it.

When Jimmy [pseudonym], who is only nine years old, was kicked out of his house, he slept with five dogs to keep himself warm, and this was in the middle of winter. He was underneath someone's house for five days before the police found him. His parents had been drinking for one full week, and that's before his mother went to the hospital to have a baby. (The baby was born a fetal alcohol syndrome baby, alcoholic at birth). Afterwards, his mother wouldn't feed Jimmy. She said that everything was for the baby so Jimmy went begging for food. And this case is not unusual.

I have kids in the day care centre who are so hungry that they will sneak out of the playroom to see what crumbs they can find on the kitchen floor. Others will eat lunch ever so slowly, so that when everybody else is finished, they can eat what's left on the plates. I also have kids who haven't had their clothes changed since Christmas (almost a month) except by me.

Many times, the old people have told me that they see a big difference in the way people raise their children on this new reserve. They say that parents never used to physically abandon their young like they do now. They tell me that in the old days, there was an importance and a value placed on children. Children had responsibilities -- to haul water, to set snares for rabbits, to chop wood, to help on the trapline. Now kids have no responsibilities, no chores. People used to have children to help them, and to take care of them when they get old. Now they have children because they get drunk and have sex. There is no

respect for children anymore. And there is no respect for the old either. This has something to do with the fact that in this type of economy, both are 'useless' except for bringing in the family allowance and the old age pension.

The problem is not that there is no 'love' for everyone knows that Indian people love and indulge their children. The problem is a paradox. The Grassy Narrows people would do anything for their children if they knew how, but they are caught between what they know how to do, and the conditions of life on this new reserve....In some ways, the kids are spoiled. For example, they will have the fancy skates that are advertised on TV. They will be given lots of money to spend on cokes and candy. They will have a color television in the house. But they won't be fed properly, and they may not have proper winter clothing. These children lack the most basic things: security, shelter, food, and love that is demonstrated. It's these things that are tragically absent or at least the children don't have them on a regular basis. No one sits down to tell them stories, no one talks to them about their problems. The kids feel uncared for and unwanted, and how can they respect parents who won't feed them and will beat them when they're drunk? The love is there and it's powerful, but it is unspoken and undemonstrated, on both sides."<sup>43</sup>

This interview has been quoted at length because it offers a vivid glimpse into the reality of reserve life for children. The point is well made that aside from the pathology of parental alcoholism, certain appearances of neglect arise from the fact that traditional child-rearing patterns have become dysfunctional under the fundamentally changed social and economic order of the new reserve.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the emphasis on the "big difference" between the old reserve way of life and the contemporary community with regard to the physical care of children reaffirms the fact that pervasive child neglect is a recent phenomenon associated with the new reserve.

---

43

Interview with Peggy Halcrow and Leslie Fraser, January 19, 1980.

44

Part II deals with the description of changes in social and economic life after the move to the new reserve. See in particular: chapter 5, pp. 120-125 and chapter 8, pp. 272-278.

Alcoholism, which intensifies and sharpens the contradictions arising from the collision of two ways of life, places an almost unbelievable toll on the lives of children at Grassy Narrows. Perhaps one way to leave an imprint of its effects is to reveal the situation in microcosm during an ordinary five-day period of drinking (following a payday) in June, 1979.

Friday, June 15, 1979<sup>45</sup>

Peggy comes over to tell me that last night, just before midnight, she found four-year old Dolores wandering alone around the reserve, about two miles from her home. She called the police and they went to the house to investigate. They found Dolores' three-year old sister, Diane, huddled in a corner, crying. The house was empty, bare of food, and all windows were broken. The police confirmed that the parents had gone to Kenora the day before, and were drinking in town. Both of them were sober when they deserted their children.

It's going to be a bad weekend. The police also picked up an eighteen-month old baby. It had been abandoned in an empty house. No one seemed to know how long that child had been left alone...the milk in that house had turned sour. The baby was severely dehydrated and lying in its own vomit and accumulated excrement. Next door, the police found two people lying unconscious on the floor.

My friend S. is very angry with his sister. This isn't the first time that she has left her two small children and gone to town to drink. But then, her parents used to leave her alone when they were drinking, so the pattern repeats itself through generations.

Saturday, June 16, 1979

I am working on the Community Research Project when, at ten o'clock, Peggy calls me through the window. Duncan (one of the police officers) has just delivered to her house a 9-month old baby. She calls me to come and see it. The child's head is deformed. He has obviously been hit, or kicked, or thrown to the floor earlier in his infancy.

---

45

This description "in microcosm" is based on notes from my diary. Names of people have been changed, symbolized by an initial, or omitted in order to protect the innocent.

Peggy Halcrow, who is often mentioned in the excerpt above, lived next door to me and thus we had frequent occasions to talk. The police brought her the children who had been abandoned not only because she is, by nature, a warm-hearted person, but also because as the day care centre supervisor, she was considered to be "experienced" in the care of small children.

The little boy's face, neck, arms are covered with sores, and the area around his ears is deep red from coagulated blood. He's got bruise marks all over his body. Duncan says that he found the baby locked up in a room after he took everybody else in the house to jail because they were drunk and fighting. I find out who the baby belongs to; the mother has apparently been drinking solidly for the last three days. Somehow, this second child is still alive. Her first baby, which she had when she was 15 years old, was nearly crushed to death, and is now in the care of C.A.S. Duncan says that this one will die if the C.A.S. social workers do not take it away.

There has been a lot of shouting in the house next door. My neighbour, Sally, has been drinking. One of her relatives decided to go guiding, and he had brought his ten-month old baby for Sally to care for. But because Sally decided she wanted to drink, she took the baby and "dropped it off" in someone's empty house. The prevailing attitude to infants in Grassy Narrows seems to be "if you feel like drinking, children no longer have the right to exist."

Sunday, June 17, 1979

Peggy drops in to tell me that she has another baby in her care. Old Annie Stone had called her to say that there was a child crying in the bush behind the house. Peggy went to find out what the problem was, and discovered an eight-month baby that had been abandoned. The infant was covered in mosquito bites. Apparently, the parents left the child in the care of older siblings and went drinking in town. The girls who were supposed to look after the child felt like sniffing gasoline. So they took the baby and threw it in the bush.

Just before this incident, Peggy saw a young mother "forget" her infant on the dock! The family was drinking, because they had all staggered into the boat. As the boat was pulling away from the dock, the baby started to crawl towards the water. It was a matter of seconds before the child would have drowned, but a passer-by saw what was happening and ran to the dock. (P.S. It took the mother three days to remember that she had a child missing. Her first child died from acute physical neglect at the age of six months in 1974).

11:00 p.m. There is a loud banging on the door. The kids are shouting for help; they want to see Hiro. He goes with them and returns about an hour later with the news that a nine-year old girl is in "really bad shape" after sniffing gas, and another is hysterical. The girls have all been into gas this weekend while their parents are in town drinking.<sup>46</sup>

---

46

"Hiro" is Hiroyuki Miyamatsu, a Japanese photo-journalist, who came to Grassy Narrows from Tokyo in 1975 to observe and record on film the first (potential) case of Minamata disease in Canada. Hiro lived and worked on the reserve until the end of 1979.



Monday, June 18, 1979

I saw Mary today. The child is having a severe reaction to the medicine she is taking for impetigo, a bacterial infection. Her beautiful face has been so scarred from the impetigo that she has had to have it sanded. She's only seven years old. She and her sister are in and out of foster homes. The teachers plead with the C.A.S. to keep her away from the reserve, because only then does her face have a chance to heal from the sores. The C.A.S. say they can't keep her; the court keeps sending her back to the conditions of abject filth wherein the sores of the face and body open up again.

In the evening, another desperate case of gas sniffing. A girl, eleven years old, is out of her mind and raving as if in madness. Her cousin is in the same state. Pitiful and shocking to see children so alone in their world, so totally bereft of love. Both sets of parents have been drinking in Kenora since Wednesday.

Tuesday, June 19, 1979

It's after midnight. I am called out by a group of children and taken to the back of the recreation center. A girl, about fourteen, is crumpled up by the wall; she is unable to keep her balance, unable to speak, her eyes are rolling around, and I smell gas. I borrow a car. She offers no resistance as I get her into the car and take her to the police. The family is in town. Mother and brother were burned to death in a house fire last March during a drinking party.

Wednesday, June 20, 1979

I am glad to be leaving Grassy Narrows. Last night, there was more screaming at the back of the house as a gang of kids brutally beat up a young teenage girl. In the last week, there was hardly a single night unbroken by the cries of children. I'm glad to be going home.

This fragment from my diary is not a unique representation of events. The incidents are real and were recorded as they happened or as I knew about them. Presented in this way, the facts test the credibility of the observer and the credulity of those who are asked to believe them. Yet, in microcosm, these five days reveal many of the elements that make up the pattern of child neglect in this community. For example, of the eleven incidents that came to my attention, seven were cases of desertion in one form or another. Three incidents involved gas sniffing, and one was a serious case of child abuse and desertion combined. Fourteen children were affected by the binge drinking of parents, and five were just infants under the age of two. Significantly, only three out of the eleven incidents would have been reported to the Children's Aid Society. The pattern that emerges solely on the basis of my personal experience,

or that of others close to me, during a five-day period is, however, a representative one. It shows desertion to be the most common form of child neglect when adults choose to drink, followed by negligence in feeding and caring for the young. Such negligence includes the failure to maintain personal hygiene and cleanliness in the environment, and failure to treat sores and infections arising from squalid physical surroundings.<sup>47</sup> Specific cases of brutal child abuse are rare but not unknown, and child rape is not uncommon.<sup>48</sup> A typical kind of child abuse is illustrated in the following example:

"S. and J. will come into the day care centre with cigarette burns on their arms. At first, they used to tell me that those were mosquito bites, but when I asked 'how come those bites got so big so fast?', they finally admitted that, 'It's daddy...when he's drunk, he wakes us up with his cigarettes. If we cry because it hurts us, then he puts us out in the bush, and then the mosquitoes bite us bad....'

I know that S. and J. are extremely abused in that house. It's no wonder. They have a stepmother who's only eighteen years old. She has those two kids, plus a baby that will be two years old in June, and one that will be one year old in July. And on top of that, now she's pregnant and due in May.

When there's drinking in that house, as there often is, all hell breaks loose."<sup>49</sup>

---

47

Many children at Grassy Narrows have impetigo, a bacterial infection that starts when a tiny scratch in the skin is exposed to filth. It will heal only without its crust, at which point the condition is also highly contagious. Some children have their entire body covered with this infection. Last summer (1979), the police found two infants so extensively covered with impetigo that they could not make out the outlines of their faces. Impetigo poorly treated leaves permanent scars.

The other condition that is common at Grassy Narrows is a fungus infection that needs antibiotic treatment. Children have running sores from this condition on their hands, arms, feet, legs, and belly.

48

During drinking parties, some children are made participants in sexual acts. The teachers know that this kind of abuse exists because the kids talk about it in school; they just say "my daddy did this to me..." without being aware of the implications of what they are saying.

49

Peggy Halcrow, notes from my diary for June, 1979.

The ways in which children learn to live with the cruel circumstances of childhood, the "mechanisms of coping" that they use to brave, resist, or escape from a reality not of their own making, have far-reaching effects. Reference has already been made to the formation of "gangs" that are substitutes for a family unit, and to the conscious utilization of criminal behaviour as a means towards the end of "getting out of the reserve". In desperation against their powerlessness to change things, some desire death and achieve it through suicide. Other children, who are a little older, mimic their parents by getting drunk and "having sex" usually with their siblings. Sex is an escape from reality and a way of coping with the lack of affection. Although no one admits this publicly, and a "tight lip" policy is in effect practiced by Medical Services personnel, venereal disease is a very serious problem among young children.<sup>50</sup> Alcohol, sex, and a desire for death are components of a typical response by children to soul-searing neglect, as illustrated in the following example:

"Stewart [pseudonym], is ten years old. One night he was being beaten up by other kids because he had stolen a 40 oz. bottle of rye and had drank it all by himself. We took him home and stayed with him all night because he was close to alcohol poisoning. He thrashed about in a wild frenzy and kept screaming that he needed 'to have a fuck!'. As he began to get sober around the morning, he said that he wanted death to come. He got serious and said that he would kill himself.

At 7:00 that morning, his mother burned her house down. She had been drinking all night too. She lit a fire in the bedroom and one in the kitchen, and then went outside and watched the house burn to the ground.

Here we were. We had Stewart wanting to die and watching his house go up in flames. The worst part

---

<sup>50</sup>

In 1979, for example, venereal disease was diagnosed for a male child, eight years old, who got it from his older sister. The incidence of venereal disease among children, however, is "confidential" information, although the nurses will freely admit that it is prevalent among the adults.

was that in her stupor, his mother suddenly remembered that maybe one of her other children was still inside the burning house. It was a nightmare to watch the police go through the burning ashes looking for a body."<sup>51</sup>

Perhaps the most insidious form of coping is the use of gasoline "to get high". This is a form of escape from reality used only by children and, like drinking for the adults, it is a social activity. Sniffing gas is a widespread practice, especially among the children of heavy drinkers. Several children have already been severely burnt from lighting cigarettes while sniffing gas, but the risk of immolation has not been a strong enough deterrent against this practice. The physical burning of the body by accidental ignition of the gas has a parallel in the use of the word "burnt" to describe the destruction of the mind by lead poisoning. The following story describes what happens to children when they become "burnt" through gas sniffing. The child is only six years old, and the story is related by her grade-one teacher.

"Alicia [pseudonym] is a very neglected child. In the two years that I've had her in my class, I only saw her in clean clothes once, at the Christmas concert. I wrote a note to her home informing her father that she's going to be an angel in the school play, and she came to that concert in new jeans and a new white sweater. That's the only time I ever saw evidence that someone cares for her.

She's not fed properly either. She doesn't know where she lives. Sometimes she sleeps at her grandmother's house, sometimes at her uncle's house, and sometimes at her auntie's house. She doesn't really know who her mother is and calls several people her mother. Anyone who takes care of her, however poorly, is her mother; it doesn't matter to her.

Alicia started sniffing gas when she was three years old. She's burnt now, and the brain damage is permanent. In class, she can't concentrate and she's lost her retention ability. She has lost her sense of balance. She sways all over the place, and topples over in her chair. She falls

---

<sup>51</sup>

Peggy Halcrow and Leslie Fraser, January 19, 1980.

down sixty times a day, like a raggedy-ann doll. She has constant bruises on her arms and legs just from falling down on the floor all the time.

Now, there is a child for whom there is no hope and no future. If she's only six years old and she's burnt, what is she going to do with the rest of her life? If she can't walk, if she can't keep her balance, if she can't think and can't reason, what hope is there for her?

Alicia is going to be just like Pamela [pseudonym] whose father gave her gas so that she would sleep with him. She did and now she's burnt too and always in trouble with the guys. All the young boys gang-rape her because they know she's a 'wipe-out'. It's going to be exactly the same for Alicia, and for many other girls like her."<sup>52</sup>

The incidence of gas sniffing is not recorded in "official" documentation for it is considered to be neither a "crime" nor a "disease". Within the community, few seem to have noticed that so many children are slowly poisoning themselves and self-destructing in the process. In grade one, Alicia is the only one who is "burnt", but other children are sniffing. In grade two, of the twenty-four children in the class, ten are sniffing heavily and showing signs of mental disorientation. Over half of the children in grade three are sniffing gas. Grade four has a class of twenty children and six are in an advanced state of intellectual and emotional derangement due to the mixing of gas with alcohol. The damage to the brain of gas sniffing can be swift and fatal. Yet, it is a sign of a community in crisis that no one seems to care.

"Marlin Kokopenace was such a nice, bright kid. We all had great hopes for him and we thought that just maybe he would make it to high school. But last summer (1979), he started to sniff gas. In just one summer, he got 'burnt'. He lost his concentration and his balance. The change in him was not only physical, but emotional and mental. He seemed to have aged ten years, although he was only thirteen years old.

Then, one night in December, over the Christmas holidays, Marlin went out on the lake and froze to death.

Now, in my town, which is Newmarket, if a child is found dead, there's an investigation, an inquiry. People ask questions - where were the parents, why didn't they take care of the kid, and so on. But at Grassy Narrows, no one asked any questions when Marlin died. No one cared enough to do anything about it.

One of the most depressing things about this kind of child neglect at Grassy Narrows is that the kids, as a result, have no concept of life and no concept of wanting to live. It is beaten, it is starved, it is kicked out of them. And to us, it seems that the parents and the community care only after the child is dead. Or maybe they care, but they sure don't show it. The important thing as far as the kids are concerned, is that the kids think that their parents don't care.

To a normal child if you say, 'Don't go out on that ice because you'll fall in and freeze to death', the child will think twice. But the kids at Grassy Narrows, they will say, 'So what? I don't care!'

The kids at Grassy Narrows, they don't know exactly what death is, except that they know it's better than what they've got." 53

---

53 Ibid.

### Family Breakdown

Not so long ago, on the old reserve, the Grassy Narrows family was an extended family, bonded by strong totemic affiliations and guided by an unwritten code of respect and tolerance for each person. There were strong taboos against incest, against relationships between close relatives of the same blood line, and against promiscuity. A man and woman "belonged to each other" after a long period of courtship and after the man had proved that he could support a family. The family transmitted to the young the values of the Indian way of life, organized the productive activities of each family member, and guided social interaction. The family was the warp of the fabric of community.<sup>54</sup>

Today, the bonds that tie a family together have been broken. The Grassy Narrows people say that the changes in family life have happened since the move to the new reserve. Of fundamental importance are the changes that have taken place in the circumstances surrounding the act of reproduction. The apparent disregard for the healthy continuity of the species, the breakdown of once strict culturally-defined taboos, the lack of concern about how new life begins, these qualities point to a society that seems bent on its own destruction.

The disintegration of traditional Indian codes of behaviour in the practice of sexual relations is intimately related to alcohol abuse. The drinking party during the alcoholic binge is almost always composed of members of the same clan, the same blood line structure. During such a binge, the taboos against incest or sexual relations with members of the same family group are dissolved. It is known that many children are conceived during the drinking parties; if the woman cannot remember much about the "blackout" period, then the identity of the father of the child conceived under such conditions is uncertain. Confusion in blood line structures also occurs when children are conceived during a "gang-rape".

---

54

A more elaborate description of the Ojibwa family on the old reserve is contained in Part II, chapter 5, pp. 120-138. For a discussion of marriage customs and taboos, see pp. 132-135.

The older people of Grassy Narrows look upon the incidents of gang-rape with incomprehension and despair, for this behaviour was unknown in the old reserve. Gang-rapes, however, have been happening with increasing frequency in recent years and not all of them are "spontaneous" events that can be explained or legitimized by the fact that "people had been drinking".

"Indian people used to use tobacco to communicate with the spirits, but they never learned to use alcohol with respect. Alcohol was the white man's poison, and now it's ours.

Look what is happening to us, look what happens during the drinking parties. You think it's just because of the alcohol...but I tell you, alcohol is just a cover-up for a lot of angry, hurt feelings. It poisons the system, yes, but how come we let this happen to us? The gang-rapes...a group of men will sometimes conspire to ask a young girl to a drinking party. They will give her drink until she passes out. Then they will each have sex with her. If the girl is not quite passed out, the experience can be very bad for her especially if her father is involved in the gang-rape. There have been cases where the girl tries to commit suicide after that experience."<sup>55</sup>

The connection between gang-rape and attempted suicide by young women is no secret in the community, or outside it.

"Doctors who examined girls from this reserve who had taken drug overdoses found that the girls were sexually abused, I mean, they had been gang-raped. One girl was very badly bruised and had a bleeding vulva. Girls blame themselves when they find out they've been raped while they were drunk, especially when raped by members of their own family. It's a great shame to them."<sup>56</sup>

---

55

Notes from a conversation with Chief Simon Fobister, April 1978.

The idea that attempted suicide by young females is connected to the rape experience may help explain the extraordinary predominance of young females in statistics on attempted suicide. See Table I:5; out of 23 females who tried suicide, 17 were between age 14 and age 17.

56

Notes from a conversation with Steve Fobister, February 16, 1978.



Yet, there are no sanctions for those who participate in gang-rape; no reproaches for promiscuity; and there seems to be a prevailing indifference to the conditions under which reproduction takes place. People forgive acts committed under the presumed influence of alcohol.<sup>57</sup> Still, there is no doubt that there has been a marked degeneration in the cultural precepts and enduring standards by which men and women at Grassy Narrows used to conduct their lives when they were still on the old reserve. The extent to which this degeneration has progressed may best be illustrated by an example of two generations of women.

Andrea Dove (pseudonym) is a woman in her early 40's. Her mother is 66. Her mother is a traditional Indian woman who married for the second time only after the death of her first husband. All her children come from only one man. Andrea Dove, on the other hand, has nine children. The first two are from a man she lived with before she was married; they carry her maiden name. The next three are from the man she married, and they carry her married name. The next three children, however, each have a different father; the paternity is uncertain because they were conceived during an alcoholic binge. The last child is from the man she is living with now. This situation of nine children of six different fathers would have been inconceivable under the code of behaviour of the old reserve way of life.

---

57

The concept of "promiscuity" defines sexual behaviour that is indiscriminate, random, and contrary to prevailing cultural norms. As long as people are drinking, however, the concept of promiscuity no longer applies. It applies only to illicit sexual behaviour when a person is sober. An example clarifies this characteristic approach to human sexual behaviour at Grassy Narrows:

On the old reserve, if a baby was born badly deformed, it was left to die because the people believed it was inhabited by an evil spirit. When, in June of 1979, a young woman's child died from having its cord twisted around its neck, the Grassy Narrows people said that "the baby would have been a bad baby", in the sense of not having a good spirit. What they also were saying, however, is that the baby was "bad" because it was conceived with a man that was not the husband of the woman and (with emphasis) "she was not drunk when she did it". In this particular case, promiscuity was not tolerated and people felt that the woman was "punished".

The young people of the reserve have no "role models" to follow. They see their parents' indifference to sexual taboos designed to protect the species from deformity and genetic weakness. They see the adults' behaviour during drinking parties. They note that the old precepts of family formation no longer work to structure the family as a unit. As a result, the idea that a man and woman should constitute a "family unit" prior to consummating their union through sexual relations is no longer an operative principle in the contemporary community.<sup>58</sup> Many young women want children desperately because a child gives them something to live for, something to love; they don't care about the conditions of its conception. Young people engage in sex at an early age, and young girls just beyond puberty bear children. In 1979, sixteen children were born to girls under the age of 16 who did not yet have a family of their own.<sup>59</sup> The same blurring of paternity occurs when offspring are conceived under the influence of alcohol or gasoline or when they are the products of teenage gang-rape.

The lack of concern for the conditions under which a new life begins has profound and long-term consequences for the Grassy Narrows community. An ever-increasing number of children are being born with birth defects and symptoms of mental slowness.<sup>60</sup> An increasing number of infants are

---

58

On the old reserve, it was customary for courtships to be prolonged. The boy would normally live with the family of the girl "to be looked over" by her family for his skills as a provider. He would sleep with the girl, but not have intercourse, until the family approved the relationship. At that point, the couple would be considered to have formed a "family unit" and could openly and freely act as a "married couple". This was still the custom among the "good families" of Grassy Narrows as little as ten years ago.

59

The "custom" of the new reserve with respect to family formation is a marked deviation from the traditional ways. Now, a girl conceives a child. If she knows who the father is, the boy may (or may not) move in with her after the baby is born. Generally, there are no sanctions against the boy who does not wish to live with the girl. In man-woman relationships, "nothing, nothing at all is left of the Indian way". Maryann Keewatin, February 20, 1979.

60

It is impossible to know whether the incidence of children born with symptoms of mental slowness is related to chaos in blood lines or alcohol or to both. Grassy Narrows is a very small community of persons where everybody is related to everybody else through blood or marriage.

showing the "fetal alcohol syndrome" at birth. In 1979, there were four medically diagnosed cases of infants who were born alcoholic. One such child who is now four years old is mentally retarded, has difficulty in movement, and is in the care of institutions with special programs. Others who are born healthy but who are not certain of the identity of their father, often suffer maltreatment and abuse later in life.<sup>61</sup> Other infants just don't live long enough to experience the trauma of childhood. Infanticide has reached such unprecedented levels at Grassy Narrows during the decade of the 1970's, that the police are beginning to lay charges on the parents for manslaughter/homicide.<sup>62</sup> The situations vary: one mother passed out on her baby while she was drinking and smothered it to death. Another threw her baby on the wood stove and the child died from first-degree burns. A third dropped her baby in the snow and the child froze to death. A fourth abandoned her baby in an empty house and the child died from dehydration and hypothermia. The most common form of infant death from neglect is through suffocation and abandonment. In a five-year period, 1974-1979, eight infants died by suffocation and four were abandoned. This is a formidable record of infant death in a community of only 249 adults over the age of 14.<sup>63</sup> The community forgives the parents for the death of infants. As one parent of a child put it,

"I can't explain it to you, because I can't explain it to myself. The only thing I know about alcohol is that alcohol is a stronger power than the love of children. It's a poison, and we are a broken people. We suffer enough inside, and therefore we understand each other."<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> Children who are not the offspring of the man with whom the mother is living, (or are suspected not to be the offspring) are often discriminated against, and sometimes physically maltreated.

<sup>62</sup> Until 1975, the death of infants was recorded simply as "infant death". Since that time, some deaths that were caused by neglect have been recorded as "infant death/neglect".

<sup>63</sup> Grassy Narrows has the highest number of infant deaths in the Kenora region, according to information received from Medical Services personnel in the Kenora district office. About 22% of all deaths in the community are infant deaths, compared to about 4% for the white population of Kenora.

<sup>64</sup> Arnold Pelly, May 14, 1980.

One does not have to look far for evidence that social breakdown has occurred at Grassy Narrows in a very short space of time. Almost every family has a history of profound hurt and anguish, and the effects of breakdown particularly within the middle generation (age 30-44) are far-reaching. In concluding this section, it is appropriate to present a case study of one family where the inter-generational effects of social change are vividly portrayed.

Mary Kay (not her real name) is a sixty-seven year old woman and the grandmother to 35 children. She used to drink when she was younger, especially when she lived around McIntosh, but it's been a long time now that she's had a drink. She can't afford to lose control, and there is reason for her resistance to this powerful drug: all her children are among the hard-core drinkers in the community, and now she has to protect her own grandchildren from their parents. She reflects on what has happened to her family. Three-quarters of her grandchildren have at some time or another been in the care of the Children's Aid Society. Over half have long records as juvenile delinquents. Five of her grandchildren have attempted to die from an overdose of drugs. All of them are drinking and sniffing gas, even the youngest ones. During one such bout, her own grandchildren burned her house down, and this was not the first such house-burning incident in her family. She knows and she remembers that in her time, babies used to die from illness or tuberculosis. Yet she has been a witness to the discovery of one of her grandchildren smothered to death; one that was found frozen in an empty house; and two that died from acute physical neglect. She is bewildered that everything can change so fast, that her own children don't care anymore, that the community doesn't care anymore about its own survival. And she feels powerless to change things, to turn them around.

So every few weeks, after she gets her old age pension cheque, she quietly disappears from the reserve. She takes the taxi to Kenora, and then boards the bus for Winnipeg. In the city, she goes directly to the wrestling matches and there she screams and screams and lets go of all the accumulated sorrow and rage that she says is eating her inside. That's her way of coping with the life she has.

## CONCLUSION TO PART I

We know that crystals disclose their invisible structure when and where they are broken. A human community also discloses its structure when the glue that holds it together dissolves under the impact of events and pressures both internal and external. A community reveals the extent of its disintegration when, among many things, its own members do not care anymore about whether or not they reproduce healthy offspring and when they abdicate their collective responsibilities for the physical, emotional, and spiritual survival of succeeding generations.

Social scientists who study communities in decline have pointed out that "social breakdown" can be defined and measured by certain key indicators: the incidence of violent death in any population; the rate of suicide; the incidence of alcoholism; the crime rate; the incidence of battered children, and so on. When the rates of such indicators become so extreme that they displace conventional norms of social behaviour, the society to which they pertain can be described as a society in crisis.

We also know that the "health" of any society or collectivity of people depends upon the proper functioning of a series of vital processes which allow individuals to grow, to achieve support in the quest for identity, to learn the knowledge, skills, and ways of believing of their people, to realize inherited potentialities of being. When these vital processes have been disrupted, or are found to be absent, then the society can also be said to be in a state of crisis. Under such conditions, the society is not only extremely vulnerable to negative pressures from the outside, but it is also trapped in a vortex of powerful forces whereby it can no longer help itself. It begins to reproduce its own pathology, and thus commits itself to its own self-destruction.

The evidence presented for Grassy Narrows supports the conclusion that this small community of people is in grave difficulty with respect to its very survival. While alcohol abuse plays a pivotal role in the causation of other adverse effects, like violent death and child neglect,

and while the pathology arising from alcohol abuse feeds on itself and moves through time in generations, it is a mistake to consider alcoholism as the single cause of the troubles in the community. It is a symptom of more complex processes, and is itself the effect of disturbances deep in the psyche of individuals and in the spirit of the people. It is difficult to determine what would cause the kind of pressures that would tear people apart. Intuitively, it seems that something has to go wrong in the "inner" of persons, before such indications of breakdown will appear externally and collectively.

There may not be a "solution" to the present crisis at Grassy Narrows. No proposals for remedial action, however, will have much impact unless we can arrive at an understanding of the forces that would push people to such depths of denial of their own humanity. Is there a validity to their behaviour? Part II and Part III of this work try to answer this question by examining the events and forces that combined to rend the community apart.

PART TWO

EXODUS TO EXTINCTION

## INTRODUCTION TO PART II

In the summer of 1963, the Indian Affairs office in Kenora initiated a process of relocating the people of Grassy Narrows from their "old reserve" of islands and peninsulas on the English-Wabigoon river, to a new site five miles southeast and adjacent to the Jones logging road. Government officials justified the move on the grounds that the new location, with its road access to the town of Kenora, would make it easier to provide the Indian people with some of the benefits of modern life: an on-reserve school, medical attention, electricity, water, and sewage. As a matter of public policy, the time had come to redress the historic disparity in standards for material well-being between Indian and non-Indian communities. It was also the moment to break the cultural and geographic isolation of those Bands that had resisted past governmental efforts at assimilation.

Up to the time of re-settlement, contact of the Grassy Narrows people with the white society took place on the basis of their active participation in the regional economy as expert trappers, guides, harvesters of wild rice and berries, and commercial fishermen. Their relationship with government officials was confined to semi-annual visits by doctors from the Indian Health Service, and to annual ceremonial visits by the Indian Agent and an officer of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) on Treaty Day. The limited nature of this contact with the white society and its officialdom did not yet serve to undermine many of the traditional Ojibway ways. There was still some stability and continuity with the ancient ways of life, and these had yielded slowly to the eroding forces of time. The people of Grassy Narrows continued to live within the protective boundaries of their ancestral lands; they preserved their clan-based extended family as the basis of social organization; and, they maintained their seasonal pattern of migration from the winter trapping grounds to the summer community of the old reserve. In this way, they were able to preserve much of their culture, much of their self-sufficiency in terms of material provisioning, and much of their freedom.



The exodus from the old reserve was a turning point in the history of the Grassy Narrows Band. All the people date the beginning of their time of troubles from this event. They say they live in crisis because they had been uprooted. In the transplantation, while old roots were surrendered, and before new ones had been or could be established, they were faced with another blow, mercury poisoning. By 1970, however, old social ties had snapped; men and women had given up traditional roles and occupations when they ceased to trap as a family; and, the special relationship of the people to the land that had cushioned all previous crises was severely undermined by the imposed economic, political, and spatial order of the new reserve.

The description of the place and importance of relocation in the life of the people of Grassy Narrows is the subject of Part II. During the two years of my residence on the reserve, I recorded hundreds of hours of conversation with Band members, calling upon their direct experience as evidence to guide the analysis of their present condition. The path directed by the evidence is one which requires the reader to imagine a time for the Indian people of Grassy Narrows when the slow shift of social and economic forces broke loose in the major upheaval of their exodus, and cast them adrift from their moorings in time, space, and a way of life.

## Chapter 2.

### ORIGINS AND EARLY HISTORY OF THE GRASSY NARROWS BAND

The Grassy Narrows people like to say that they have "always lived on the English River" in northwestern Ontario. They are deeply attached to this land and the river, and their roots in this territory are of long standing. Although some historians believe that the ancestors of the present inhabitants of this region occupied the same area at the time of the first contact with Europeans in the early seventeenth century, others insist that there were no peoples who could be categorized as "northern" Ojibwa at this time.<sup>1</sup> The latter interpretation is favoured by historical evidence which indicates that the aboriginal Ojibwa inhabited only the north shore of the upper Great Lakes,<sup>2</sup> and that a major migration of the Ojibwa took place westward and north of Lake Superior into the area now known as northwestern Ontario only in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

---

1

By the nineteenth century, four main divisions of Ojibwa had emerged; the Southeastern Ojibwa, the Southwestern Ojibwa (Chippewa), the Plains Ojibwa, and the Northern Ojibwa. The four divisions are the result of a historic process that began in mid-seventeenth century involving trade, conquest, and migration. The Plains Ojibwa moved into the province of Manitoba and adopted many features of Plains tribes; the Southeastern Ojibwa occupied the lower Michigan peninsula and parts of southern Ontario; and the Southwestern Ojibwa gradually pushed into Wisconsin and Minnesota. The general agreement on the boundaries of the Ojibwa in these regions does not extend to the northern Ojibwa, northwest of Lake Superior.

2

The ancestors of the present "northern" Ojibwa are believed to have occupied a territory from the east end of Georgian Bay on Lake Huron to Michipicoten Bay on the northeast shore of Lake Superior at the time of contact. Missionaries encountered large groups of these Algonquian-speaking peoples around Sault Ste. Marie, and it became the custom of the French to refer to these people as the People of the Sault, or the Saulteaux. Even today, the Ojibwa Indians of northern Ontario are called Saulteaux to distinguish them from the Ojibwa of southwest and eastern Ontario.

3

The movement of the Ojibwa westward and north of Lake Superior was stimulated by the expanding fur trade. At first, the Ojibwa acted as middlemen in the fur trade to the Cree and Assiniboin, but later in the seventeenth century they became trappers themselves. As the Cree and Assiniboin moved eastward, the Ojibwa moved north to Lac Seul and to the region of the Lake of the Woods. Charles A. Bishop, The Northern Ojibwa and the Fur Trade, (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada Limited, 1974), pp. 3-7 and 305-335.

Throughout the eighteenth century, the life of the Ojibwa was characterized by mass migrations, population growth, and the segmentation of the once large corporate kin groups called patrilineal clans into much smaller and highly mobile clan-designated family groups.<sup>4</sup> The adaptation to the new conditions of the fur trade involved not only this change in the social organization of the aboriginal Ojibwa, but also a realignment in patterns of resource use. The hunting of large game animals for subsistence became less important as the subsistence economy became oriented to trapping and trading. Although some items of barter such as guns and powder afforded the Ojibwa better technological control over their environment, the Indians also

"became increasingly reliant on the Hudson's Bay Company for muskets and shot, for clothing, and certain items of food...New appetites were created, which could be fed only by the Hudson's Bay Company, new subsistence techniques were developed, based upon the old, but for which Hudson's Bay equipment was necessary."<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Bishop, The Northern Ojibwa, p. 331, cites evidence that the eight or ten groups of Ojibwa that had originally pushed north and west of Lake Superior in the 1720's and 1730's, had increased to about 30 groups by 1780. The population of Ojibwa is believed to have doubled in the 1730-1780 period.

The functional importance of large patrilineal clans that were the basis of social organization among aboriginal Ojibwa diminished during this period, presumably because their size prevented them from becoming effective trapping units. The smaller groups, of about 20-35 persons, could be much more mobile in the search for furs and in the procurement of the best price for their pelts. As such, they could take advantage of the competition among the Hudson's Bay Company and the Northwest Company to secure trade on the most advantageous terms. As these smaller groups came to more fully exploit game resources, they became localized in certain regions, especially after trading posts were built in the interior.

<sup>5</sup> Martin H. Greenwood, Big Trout Lake: A Pilot Study of a Northern Indian Settlement in Relation to its Resource Base, (Ottawa: Department of Citizenship and Immigration, Economic and Social Research Division, 1964), p.5.

There are many excellent references on the Ojibwa and the fur trade. In addition to Bishop, The Northern Ojibwa, are the following: Harold Hickerson, The Chippewa and Their Neighbours: A Study in Ethnohistory (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), Arthur J. Ray, Indians in the Fur Trade: Their Role as Trappers, Hunters, and Middlemen in the Lands Southwest of Hudson Bay, 1660-1870 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), and Edward S. Rogers, "Changing Settlement Patterns of the Cree-Ojibwa of Northern Ontario", South-Western Journal of Anthropology 19: 64-88.

The process of population growth, segmentation, and ecological adaptation continued into the nineteenth century until, under the pressure of much changed environmental conditions, specific bands of Ojibwa became associated with specific trading posts.<sup>6</sup> In this way, many of the original Grassy Narrows families assembled in the spring and summer at the Hudson's Bay main trading post at Lac Seul, and at smaller outposts on other lakes in the region of the English River. As a "loosely-knit confederacy of small family groups"<sup>7</sup> under the hereditary leadership of Chief Sah-katch-away, the Grassy Narrows people entered into treaty negotiations with the Dominion of Canada in 1871.

On October 3, 1873 Chief Sah-katch-away and seventeen other Chiefs of the Saulteaux Indians of the Lake of the Woods, signed the North-West Angle Treaty, or Treaty No. 3, with Her Majesty, the Queen of Britain and Ireland. To this day, the Grassy Narrows people consider this treaty the foundation of their relationship to the Government of Canada and to the people of Canada. Because of its historical importance, and contemporary relevance to Indian rights, it is worth reviewing the treaty's main provisions:

---

6

Three major factors apparently accounted for the sharply curtailed mobility of Ojibwa groups and their seasonal settlement around trading posts. The first was the amalgamation of the Northwest Company and the Hudson's Bay Company in 1821, a development which reduced competition between fur buyers and the advantages of travel among trading posts in search for better prices. The second was the disappearance of large game animals from northwestern Ontario. This constriction of the food supply had the effect of bringing the Ojibwa closer to the trading posts where they could get food and supplies on credit. The third was the general decline in the European demand for furs, and the passing of the heyday of the fur trade...Although they still were able to hunt, trap, and fish, "they...congregated around specific [trading] posts, where they relied on fishing as their principal means of subsistence." Paul Driben and Robert S. Trudeau, The Fort Hope Experience: The Devastating Impact of Government Intervention in the Affairs of an Indian Band, unpublished manuscript, pp. 51-52.

7

This phrase aptly characterizes the state of political organization among Ojibwa bands in northwestern Ontario just before the signing of Treaty.

1. The Indian Chiefs agreed to "cede, release, surrender, and yield" to the Government, forever, all their rights, titles and privileges to 55,000 square miles of land, from the height of land west of Lake Superior to Lake Winnipeg, and from the American boundary to the height of land north of the English River.

2. The Government agreed to lay aside reserves for the benefit of Indians, to be administered and dealt with for them by the Government; these reserves would not exceed one square mile for each family of five.

3. The Government agreed that the Indians shall have the right to pursue their traditional occupations of hunting and fishing throughout the tract of land surrendered, subject to "such regulations as may from time to time be made by Government and saving or excepting such tracts as may, from time to time, be required or taken up for settlement, mining, lumbering, or other purposes" by Government.

4. The Government agreed to "maintain schools for instruction", to encourage farming among Indians by supplying them with agricultural implements, seed, and cattle, and to give them ammunition and twine for fish-nets.<sup>8</sup>

5. In "extinguishment of all claims" by Indians against the Government, each Indian person was given a present of \$12. Every year, each Indian person would be given \$5. The Chief and Councillors would receive a salary of \$25 and \$15 per year, respectively; every three years, they would also get a suit of clothing, a flag, and a medal.<sup>9</sup>

In 1882, the Government complied with its promise of allocating "reserves" for Indians, and delineated two Reserves for the Indians represented by Chief Sah-katch-eway, one at Grassy Narrows comprising 10,224 acres, and the other at Wabauskang, comprising 8,042 acres. Although at the time of signing the treaty, Chief Sah-katch-way represented the "single Mattawan and English River Band", for administrative reasons, in 1887, the Government recognized both groups as separate bands with separate reserves.<sup>10</sup> The Grassy Narrows people say, however, that they had always been "one Band", although they had two reserves.

---

<sup>8</sup> The provisions for assistance in the pursuit of livelihood (farming, hunting, and fishing), would in modern times be interpreted to mean programs of economic development.

<sup>9</sup> An account of treaty negotiations can be found in Alexander Morris, The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba and the Northwest Territories, (Toronto: Belfords, Clarke, 1880).

<sup>10</sup> Memorandum from R.C. Maguire, Treaties and Historical Research Centre, Ottawa to E.G. Morton, Lands, Membership, and Estates, DIAND, Toronto dated December 17, 1976 on the subject of the formation of the Grassy Narrows Band.

From the signing of the treaty to the turn of the century, the Grassy Narrows people continued their seasonal migration from winter trapping grounds to summer base camp on the reserve or around Hudson Bay trading posts.<sup>11</sup> Their quasi-nomadic way of life based on hunting, trapping and fishing for subsistence seems to have been unaffected by the population boom and the resource development activity seventy miles south that followed the coming of the transcontinental railway. The completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway line in 1881 through Rat Portage (now Kenora) enabled the expansion of white settlement and provided the essential conditions for the logging and mining industries.<sup>12</sup> The Grassy Narrows people, however, had no real place in the developing society on the frontier. Their resources were not yet important to this white economy, and their contact with "the outside world" continued to be limited to fur traders and missionaries.

The first missionaries to the people of Grassy Narrows "were French people, Roman Catholics...they came by canoes, following the routes of the traders."<sup>13</sup> Some of the history of the Oblate Missionaries in the area

---

11

From all accounts, it seems that Grassy Narrows families were still highly mobile in their residence habits up to the time when the Hudson's Bay Company established a trading post on the site of the old reserve of Grassy Narrows in 1911. Marcel Pahpasay (March 17, 1977) describes his family's movements this way:

"My family...we used to put down camp in the summertime wherever the Bay had a trading place...In the old days, the Bay had a post at Pekangekum, One Man Lake, Minaki, Wilcox Lake, and of course, at Lac Seul. Then the Bay moved from Wilcox Lake to Oak Lake, and from Oak Lake to around Ball Lake, and from Ball Lake to the site of the old reserve. I think the Bay bought their island on the old reserve from a free trader called Bush....The people, they just followed the Bay around."

12

Rat Portage was once the focal point of trade because it was situated at the north end of the Lake of the Woods at the outlet of the Winnipeg River, one of the major trade routes west. The Hudson's Bay Company had its headquarters at Rat Portage. With the construction of the CPR railway (1879-1884), logging operations sprung up over most of the Lake of the Woods area; the gold rush started in the 1890's. Apparently there were about 30 small gold mines within 22 miles of Kenora. A pulp mill was built in Kenora about 1920. Duane R. Lund, Lake of the Woods Yesterday and Today, (Staples, Minnesota: Nordell Graphic Communications, 1977).

13

Information received from John Kokopenace, date not recorded in my files.

of the English River is related by Father Lacelle, who spent 26 years of his life doing missionary work among the Indians of this area:

"The Oblates started doing missionary work among the Saulteaux before the 1900's. Their main route was the English River, and they travelled it by canoe. The first small mission was started at Whitedog in the 1840's, but then our missionaries moved further north. Our mission at Whitedog was sold to the Bay Company, but then the Bay sold it to the Anglicans, who became much more active at Whitedog than the Catholics...This was not true of Grassy Narrows. Father Macuil was already visiting the Grassy Narrows people in 1905, and in 1910-1915, Father Clement was the priest at Lac Seul, and therefore knew very well the people of the English River...The people moved around a lot in those days, you know, so you had to catch up with them around the trading posts after the trapping season."<sup>14</sup>

Most of the influence of the missionaries before the First World War was felt by those Grassy Narrows people who were taken to residential school in Kenora<sup>15</sup>. In 1909, the Canadian National Railway completed a line about midway between the reserve of Grassy Narrows and Kenora, and this line afforded much better access to the northern Saulteaux:

"Every summer...the priest would come in on the CNR railway and stop at Jones. Then he would paddle up the river in the canoe, and look for the children that should be going to school...I went to residential school, St. Mary's in Kenora, around the first world war, I think. The school was called St. Anthony's then. Old John Loon went there too. The priest came to Wabauskang to pick us up. My father would walk from the reserve to Kenora to visit us, after Christmas. Took him one day to do that, but maybe he would camp half way sometimes and rest. I was only in school for four years, because my father needed me on the trapline."<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Father Lacelle, O.M.I. in Winnipeg, April 3, 1979.

<sup>15</sup> John Kokopenace, 67 years old, assured me that "as far back as he can remember", there was a small school run by the French mission priests at Grassy Narrows. However, the school was apparently used very little, and "this must have been a long time ago."

<sup>16</sup> Charlie Fobister, 76 years of age, March 9, 1979. Pat Loon, translator.

In 1919, a massive influenza epidemic broke out on the Wabauskang site, and spread quickly to the small groups of Indians around Maynard Lake, Indian Lake and Ball Lake. Over a thousand people are believed to have died.<sup>17</sup> Father Lacelle recalls:

"Wabauskang was a big reserve once, but it was wiped out during the epidemic...This was a big catastrophe for the people because they couldn't explain it. They were scared of it and took it as a kind of spiritual punishment."<sup>18</sup>

From the time of the epidemic, the Wabauskang reserve became associated with a curse. The medicine men were powerless to cure the sickness and they advised against the continuation of settlement on this territory. Charles Pierrot, who succeeded his father, Chief Sah-katch-eway, in 1888, decided to relocate his people to the site of the old reserve of Grassy Narrows because that site was believed to be sacred ground. People at Grassy Narrows today contend that they are the descendants of the ten families who were north on their traplines when the epidemic hit Wabauskang. "It was the survivors" says John Kokopenace, "who were the ones to move to the old reserve after the epidemic". From the time of the move to Grassy Narrows in the mid-1920's, the people say there were no other disasters until the relocation from the old reserve to the present site in 1963. Since from this point on, the "old reserve" takes on a special meaning in the lives of the people, it is appropriate to let the way of life on the old reserve serve as the context in which the event of the relocation can be understood.

---

17

Both the date of the epidemic and the number of its casualties are in dispute. Some people say the epidemic happened in 1915; others date it in 1919. We have no records of the total population for Wabauskang prior to the epidemic, but apparently the entire reserve was wiped out and "five or six bodies were buried every day". Those who got sick at Grassy Narrows were given half a glass of rum by Donald Merchison, the Bay manager, "to sweat the fever from the body." Mr. Merchison is well remembered at Grassy Narrows for this aid, because he had to go to Kenora by dog team to get two sledge loads of rum. He lived around Grassy Narrows for a long time.

18

Father Lacelle, April 3, 1979.



### Chapter 3.

#### THE WAY OF LIFE OF A PEOPLE: THE STORY OF MAGGIE LAND

When one is describing the "way of life" of a people, one is also speaking of "culture", of those ways of knowing, imagining, and doing that a people learn to regard as natural. "To speak of culture is also to speak of the elements that shape human behaviour - the inhibitions that govern it from the inside, the rules that control it from the outside, the languages and philosophies, ideas and symbols, that serve to edit a people's experience of life, and the customs and rituals that help define how one person should relate to another and to the rest of the universe."<sup>1</sup>

The way of life of the Grassy Narrows people before the relocation is now a mass of recollections, a kaleidoscope of images, in the minds of those people who lived on the old reserve for most of their lives. These highly subjective images contain not only the memory of what "was", but also the desire of what "ought to be" and the nostalgia for what "is no more". The real and the ideal elements of the traditional culture are inextricably linked in people's reflections on what life was like before their transplantation to the present site. In spite of the difficulties presented by this mixing of memory and desire, however, there is no evidence more powerful than that drawn directly from what people say, in their own words, about their life experience. Therefore, as an introduction to the way of life on the old reserve, I have chosen to present the life history of one woman, Maggie Land, as told to me in a series of conversations over a number of years.<sup>2</sup> Passages spoken at different times have been brought together; other passages have been condensed and edited for greater clarity. From the resonance of her personal experience there emerges the first sketch of the life of the community of the old reserve of Grassy Narrows.

---

<sup>1</sup> Kai T. Erikson, Everything in Its Path, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976), p. 79.

<sup>2</sup> Of particular importance are interviews conducted on November 27, 1977, November 26, 1978, March 4, 1979, and March 25, 1979 at Grassy Narrows.

As a prologue to her own story, here a few details of the life of Maggie Land. Born in 1916, she was one of two children from a liaison between her Indian mother, Mary Petiquan, of an old Wabauskang family, and a white father, Frank Isbister, who was the manager of the Hudson's Bay Company trading post. In 1910, her mother married John Loon of Grassy Narrows, and had four children, two of whom survived infancy and became half-sisters to Maggie. Three years later, Maggie went to residential school at McIntosh and stayed there for twelve years. In 1935, at the age of nineteen, she married into one of the most prominent and powerful clans of Grassy Narrows. Jerry Fobister was thirteen years her senior, and the direct descendant of Chief Sah-ketch-away, who signed the treaty. She had eight children by him, five of whom died in infancy. After his death in 1950, Maggie lived with his brother, Charlie Fobister, and had three more children by him. She left Charlie and the old reserve in 1958-59, and went to live with her son, Andrew, who had a job on the railroad at Jones. There she met Isaac Land, a man ten years her junior, whom she married in 1963. They had no children. Isaac worked on the CNR railroad at different places - Dryden, McIntosh, Favell - and so they travelled from place to place before returning to the new reserve in 1972. Maggie Land now has 25 grandchildren, and 5 great grand-children. She is no stranger, however, to alcohol-related violence: her 24-year old daughter was brutally murdered around McIntosh in 1969; her last child, Patrick, only 17 years old, died from shotgun wounds after a drinking party on the new reserve in 1974. Yet, Maggie is an energetic, lively, hard-working, and generous woman of 65 years. She is the recognized and undisputed matriarch of her large extended family, and a woman to be reckoned with in the community.

Maggie Land:

"I was brought up by my grandparents, my mother's parents. In those days, most children were brought up by grandparents.... I still remember the stories my grandmother told me. At night, the people used to give the old people tobacco so that they told the stories. Sometimes we would fall asleep when the stories started, but sometimes I remember them. Some would be about white people. Some would be about wars with other Indians. We still fought with the Sioux Indians in my great grandmother's time.

I used to hear from my grandparents and the old people that everything is going to change in our Indian ways. I don't know how they knew to be able to tell about the future, but they had their ways of knowing what was going to happen. But they had no books, they couldn't read, and they had no Bible. They said that if we lived long enough, we will see that what they say is true, that all these things will happen. My grandmother used to tell me that I will see something in the skies. I think she was thinking of an airplane. She said that the white man will take over the land, and that is happening too. She said there would be many killings on the reserve. When these killings began, sudden-like, here, I remembered what she had said. I don't know how they knew these things. But my grandmother used to say, the ones they know what's going to happen, they fast for ten days and ten nights, and then they dream about it. She used to tell us to fast like that too.

When I was around seven years old, I went to residential school.<sup>3</sup> I was one of the first in the school at McIntosh which was run by the Oblate Fathers and Sisters. At first, people were lonely for their children, especially if it was the first child that had to go to school...but after a few weeks, they got used to it. Grassy Narrows was the closest reserve to McIntosh, as the crow flies...people used to come to be close to their children. They came by water, in canoes. Sometimes they would camp on the other side of the lake. Visits were permitted every Sunday. I was in this school twelve years, until I was nineteen years old. I was still at school when my husband came and picked me up and we got married in the church at McIntosh. He was 32. This was Jerry Fobister.

I never knew where babies come from. We were told that 'babies come by snowshoes'. But soon I had my first baby, and he died from fever. People used to lose many babies in those days. My second son, Andrew, was born the next year. Then Evelyn came. Then John. John died when he was four, from fever. I don't know what fever it was. Margaret was born at the end of the second world war. But then my three youngest, Roy, Robert, and Jeanne, died from fever too.

---

<sup>3</sup>

The McIntosh residential school was built in 1923-24. Until 1949 when a road was built through McIntosh, access to the school was by water or rail. At its peak, this school could house about 200 Indian children from northern reserves. The school residence burnt to the ground on March 19, 1965, but the classrooms are still standing. Many Grassy Narrows people attended residential school at McIntosh.

On the old reserve, there weren't too many jobs and so almost everyone worked on the trapline. Each family had their own trapping area. They would stay there all winter, coming back to the old reserve only at Christmas time. Or they would also go to McIntosh to visit their children in residential school. The trapping would start in the late fall and continue until the spring. In the springtime, everybody trapped for muskrat. That's the thing I miss. We all went out, by families. Sometimes we used to meet each other at one place, but everybody went, even the kids. Sometimes in March, before the ice broke. The women stayed at home to skin the muskrats and to stretch the skins. We also ate the muskrat meat, boiled or roasted. And we caught fish and beaver and ate meat with bannock. Around the end of the spring, everybody would come back to the old reserve. The old reserve was our summer camp. Around May, we started to clean our yards, and to plant our gardens.

On the old reserve, every family had its own place. And the people lived far from each other. The old reserve was a beautiful place. You could see for miles. We were not crowded there. Your neighbour was about half a mile away....

When I was growing up, we didn't meet white people very much. I still remember Charles Pierrot. He said that according to the treaty, the reserve was just for Indians. For as long as he was Chief, Charlie never let white people come into the reserve. The Chief was not afraid to talk to white people, but he didn't want them on the reserve. Anyway, in those days, the Indian Agent came only once a year, on Treaty Day. The Indian Agent used to come with the RCMP all dressed up in uniform, and a doctor. They came by canoe. As soon as the people saw the flag of the Union Jack coming, they would start a gun salute. The white people would then come to Treaty Hall, where they would shake hands with the people gathered to meet them. All the Councillors and the Chief would be in the uniform given to them by the Indian Agent. The rest of the people would be in the best clothes. Treaty Day was a big celebration for us. There would be a pow-wow, and dancing, and the beating of drums. Sometimes, even a square dance, with everybody participating.

The Indian Agent paid treaty money to the head of the family. If a young girl gets a baby, and she is not married, she had to appear before everybody and say who the father was. She couldn't get the treaty money if she didn't say that. It was very strict. This is what the Indian Agent wanted. During my time, it was Frank Edwards. Then Swordman, from Sioux Lookout took over. Also the Indian Agent used to make people who were living with another man or woman - not their husband or wife - come together again. He would make the man take his old lady back. Swordman was most strict. But the Chief and Councillors were strict too. They would be responsible for putting people back together. One time, when Alex Fobister, my husband's dad, was Chief, one man tried to go away with another man's wife. The Chief and the three Councillors took a gun and canoe and went after them. They brought him back. In those days, there was more family discipline. The Chief and Council wanted children to have a mother and father living together. It was like this until about 1935, and even until after the second world war. But around the time of Hyacinthe as Chief [late 40's], things became less strict.

Still, for as long as I can remember, people could not marry of the same totem...cousins could not marry because they could not have the same blood. Today, everything has changed. Even cousins marry, and this is not good. Also, when I got married, a man had to have a house, and be a good trapper and a good hunter, and be able to provide for his family. All this has changed too. Now, kids just 'shack up' young, at 13 or 14. There is no more discipline, no more family life.

Treaty Day was first in June, long time ago. Then in May. After Treaty Day, some people went to work as guides or cabin girls in the fishing camps. My husband, Evelyn's dad, didn't. He had a job with the Hudson's Bay company hauling supplies from the Jones Road, where the CNR railway came in, to the Bay island on the old reserve....

In the middle of July, the blueberry picking started. All the families except those working in the tourist camps went picking blueberries. We used to set up tents in different places each year -- like Redditt, Brinka, Quabelle, Farlane. Somebody would always go first to look around where blueberries were the best and tell the others. At the place where we camped, you could see lots of tents. That's what we are missing now, the way it used to be, the good times when we all picked berries...We made money selling blueberries, and with this money we bought what we needed for the winter -- flour, lard, tea, sugar, salt, raisins, and canned milk. We didn't need too much else, because the men hunted for meat whenever we needed meat, and we also had fish from the river when there wasn't enough meat.

We came back to the old reserve around the end of August. We dried blueberries and raspberries for the winter. Then it was time to pick vegetables from the garden. Every family had its own garden. We had potatoes, corn, onions, pumpkins. There was also a community garden planted with potatoes. There was lots of work for everyone.

The wild rice began about the first week of September. At first, we didn't pick rice to sell it. I remember the first time we sold rice, after it was finished [processed]. Andy was just a baby that time. Now he's over forty so it must have been 40 years ago. The first time anybody sold rice, it was down the Wabigoon river, between Dryden and Quabelle. We were picking blueberries there too. That time, we could pick rice wherever we wanted to. White people didn't know about wild rice like they do now...Also, we had no licences for hunting either. The men could go out anytime. But traplines, they started making traplines after the war, the second world war. So things change. We processed rice ourselves, in the old way. I don't remember when people started to sell the rice green. I still keep some of my rice, and I still finish it the old way. I don't sell all my rice. The time of rice picking was another time when people came together, when they would have a feast. It was a happy time.

After the wild rice was over, the men used to go hunting for moose and deer. The women worked hard to dry enough meat for winter. There was lots of moose and deer around the old reserve. Enough for everybody. In those days, people shared more than they do now. Especially with the old people. The women dried fish for the winter too. There was lots of work.

In mid-October, each family got ready to go to the trapline. At first, we had dog teams, but later, we could fly out by plane. The Hudson's Bay Company helped the trappers with credit, grub stake, and for some people who had traplines far north, the Bay Company helped pay for the plane. Men trapped for beaver, muskrat, mink, otter, lynx, and fox. But mostly beaver and muskrat. Women skinned the animals and prepared the skins. Furs were sold, but we used to eat meat of beaver and muskrat. Women made clothing from deer and moose hide - moccasins, mukluks, jackets. There was always something to do. The children set snares for rabbits.

Except for a week or so at Christmas, families stayed on traplines all winter. They came back to the old reserve after spring break-up. The community of Grassy Narrows in those days was scattered. We were happier that way. There was no hunger; sickness was cured by the medicine man.

My grandfather was a medicine man. The medicine man healed the spirit of the person, not his physical body. If a child was very sick, it used to be that a medicine man held a kind of rattle over the whole body of the child. I used to be afraid when I heard the sound of that rattle echoing off the walls. When he came to the part of the body that was sick, he knew what was wrong by the sound of the rattle. He would take a piece of bone that had a hole in it, like a straw, and he would suck all the sickness from the body. When he was finished, the child got well. There is no one on the reserve today that knows about these things. My grandparents, they used to know a lot about medicine from the bark of trees and plants. I once had a bad bleeding after my baby was born. I nearly died. My grandmother made me a drink and she stopped the bleeding. In those days, every family had someone who knew about these things.

The last time I saw a shaking tent ceremony was on the old reserve. The men built a strong tent and put the stakes deep in the ground. A medicine man was inside the tent. The people who wanted help from him asked him many things. Maybe their relative was far away on the trapline and they wanted to know if he was all right. The medicine man called for the spirit of the relative. The tent would begin to shake. The spirit then came and it looked like a ball of fire. I could hear the medicine man talking to the spirit of the relative. After that, you had to give the medicine man something, a kind of gift for his work.

Life on the old reserve was hard. But people were happier then. I think it would be better to live the way we lived before. If only we could have been left alone. But maybe it's too late. It is too late. We can't bring back the past. There is no choice. The young people try to become like the white people, and the ones in-between don't know who they are. Maybe we have to join the white society, but I will not join it."

Through these images drawn from her experience, Maggie Land touches upon almost every dimension of life on the old reserve. She describes aspects of both the material and the conceptual world. On the one hand, there is the quest for food, the seasonal cycle of economic activities, the constancy of work, the division of labour among all family members, and the mix of play and work at different times in the annual cycle. On the other hand, there are "those ways of knowing and imagining", the knowledge available through dreams, and the special power of healing and divination granted to the gifted. Maggie Land also talks about "the inhibitions from the inside", the taboos governing sexual relations and marriage, and "the rules from the outside", the sanctions imposed by the Indian Agent and the Chief and Council in order to preserve the stability of the social order. She characterizes community life on the old reserve as the ebb and flow of separateness and togetherness, as a movement of family groups between the isolation of their winter trapping grounds and the sociality of the summer camp on the old reserve. Throughout her story, one can sense that everything is knotted into a firm relationship with every other thing: religion, social organization, political life, economic system, and spatial order -- these are all interrelated, all part of a larger whole, and subject to the forces of nature and the spirits of the universe. One can also sense the rhythm, the seasonal movement through time and space, and the repetition of everyday life in slow cycles from one generation to the next. Thus, life on the old reserve mirrored much of what was left in the traditional culture: trapping as a way of life, economic self-sufficiency on the part of clan-based family groups, and close ties with the natural world.

With Maggie Land's story as background, we will now discuss those dimensions of the way of life on the old reserve which were directly affected by the relocation.

#### Chapter 4.

##### WORLDS IN CONFLICT: DISPARATE CONCEPTS OF SPACE AND TIME

Perhaps one of the most important orientations provided to the human personality by culture is the orientation to space and time. Because this orientation involves such a fundamental dimension of our experience, and is so central to the ordering and coordination of human activity, we often take it for granted, and assume that people with whom we come in contact share our own spatial and temporal perception. Yet, we are also aware that among people of different cultures variations occur with respect to the selective emphasis given to the spatial relations and attributes of things, and the degree of complexity and refinement in the concepts employed.

In the context of a description of the way of life of the Grassy Narrows people on the old reserve, a focus on time and space is essential because, as a result of the relocation to the new reserve, certain aspects of the Ojibwa "way of knowing" could no longer function to structure individual and social experience. It is these aspects that we are most interested in, although there are many other characteristics of the Ojibwa orientation to time and space that were not directly affected by the transplantation to the new site.<sup>1</sup> The following discussion is also limited by what the people of Grassy Narrows have told me about their ideas and practices with respect to time and space.

---

<sup>1</sup>

The aspects of the traditional spatial orientation of the Ojibwa which do not relate directly to our focus are: the Ojibwa reliance on direct observation of natural phenomena to maintain directional orientation; direct knowledge of terrain through experience of topography and the spatial relation of one locality to another; "mental maps" which relate directly to the active quest for food and pursuit of livelihood; and, "cosmic space" in the sense of a "place" for the major spiritual entities that exist on different "planes" in the universe.

For a detailed exposition of these aspects of spatial perception, one can refer to A. Irving Hallowell, "Cultural Factors in Spatial Orientation", in Culture and Experience, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1955), pp. 184-202.



### Ojibwa Perceptions of Space and Order in Human Settlement

Perhaps the most striking feature of the Ojibwa spatialization of the world is the fact that it does not appear to be contained by what can be perceived by the senses or by what is important at the level of pragmatic action. As in the temporal sphere, their spatial frame of reference includes cosmic as well as practical values. The spatial and temporal ordering of the universe by Ojibwa people is qualitatively different from the conventional views and interpretations belonging to the Western cultural tradition.<sup>2</sup> The statement that "we see things not as they are, but as we are" is the point of departure from Western views. The Ojibwa Indians admit the probability that we perceive "reality" and interpret our human experience in the physical world only in a narrow, albeit intense, range. This range has limits which are defined by our psychological and physiological structure and by our culture. The Ojibwa concepts of time and space are not more or less "real" than ours. The difference lies in the root assumptions on which ideas of existence are based.<sup>3</sup>

Up to the time of the relocation, the Grassy Narrows people relied on two sources for the perception of space. The first source is familiar to us because it involves the use of the physical senses, and inter-sensory cooperation, to distinguish such attributes of space as size, shape, extension, direction, locality, and distance. Mediated by culture, this perception of space is indispensable for the ordering and coordination of human social and economic activity over a certain territory. Like people in every other culture, the Indians have used

---

<sup>2</sup> Western notions of time and space are qualitatively distinct from Indian orientations. Insofar as the Indians believe in the ability of the soul to transcend the limitations of the body and the conventional parameters of time and space, however, there are remarkable similarities to the ideas proposed by Christian mystics and contemplatives of the Western religious tradition.

<sup>3</sup> Several books by Edward T. Hall illustrate variations among cultures with respect to time and space: The Silent Language (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959); The Hidden Dimension (New York: Anchor Books, 1969); and Beyond Culture (New York: Anchor Books, 1977).

this mode of spatial perception to develop certain ideas about how much space is required to maintain social order among neighbours and how much territory is necessary for the satisfaction of practical needs. Thus, on the old reserve clans were separated by unspoken, yet well understood, distances and definite territories were allocated to them by custom and usage for the pursuit of trapping, hunting, and gathering occupations.

The second source of perceptual knowledge is less familiar to us because it rests on the "inner senses" or "inner perceptors" of man. Whereas the physical senses lead one to translate all experience into physical perception, the inner senses open up the range of perception and allow the interpretation of space and "reality" in a freer manner. It is not that physical reality is a false reality; it is just that the physical image is only one of many significant ways of perceiving. In this frame of reference, there is no "objective" reality; reality is that which is created by human consciousness.

We will explore first, the more familiar mode of spatial perception as it is applied by the Grassy Narrows people to the use of personal and communal space and the location in space of social units. Later, we will turn to the nature of space as it is perceived by the inner senses. We will discuss the implications of this mode of perception for the choice of sites for human settlement.

The most striking and immediate observation of space as one approaches the old reserve by water is the direct relationship between social organization and spatial form. In spite of the lack of a concept of private property among the Ojibwa, one cannot fail to notice distinct areas of the old reserve that once "belonged" to individual clans. John Beaver explains:

"On the old reserve, every family lived together. We weren't all bunched up and mixed together like we are today.... Let me tell you that on the old reserve, our life was part of the old ways, the way we've always lived...."

Every family had their own territory on the old reserve. Every family had their own trapping ground in the winter. The families would come together only in the spring and in the summer. Then, on their own territory, each family would plant potatoes in their own garden, and catch fish which was important for food in the summertime. Each family could get to the water without crossing anybody else's land; not like today, where only some families are on the water.

And then, on the old reserve, the families were far apart from each other. We lived beside the Fobisters, about a half mile apart; in-between us were the Lands. The Lands all lived together... Coming to the island, John Loon and the Loons lived on that island, up the English river. The Assins were more on the Wabigoon side of the river. The Hyacinthes all lived together on one shore...the next point belonged to the Ashopenaces...then the Fishers, then the Necanapenaces... the Taypaywaykejicks had a different spot too. It was traditional for all the clans to live separately from each other. That's the way they have always lived. It was much better that way."<sup>4</sup>

Clan territoriality certainly played an important role in re-inforcing the identity of the group and its "place" in the order of things. The sense of "place" was very strong for individual members of the group as well:

"On the old reserve, you knew your place. It wasn't private property, but it was a sense of place, your place, your force around you."<sup>5</sup>

A large clan, moreover, may have had more than one house on the old reserve; it could form a mini-colony of people, spatially, economically and socially independent from the rest of the Band:

"My family's house on the old reserve was very good, made from logs. It had two storeys. All the Fobister brothers, they were carpenters and helped build it. Each brother, Jerry, Dennis, Tom, Father, and I -- we had our own houses, but

---

<sup>4</sup> John Beaver, March 10, 1979, translated by Pat Loon.

<sup>5</sup> Andy Keewatin, January 5, 1979.

in the same clearing. Five log houses, the whole clan, together. The family would all help one another. It was better to be scattered, to live far apart from other people."<sup>6</sup>

The wide distances among clans on the old reserve reflected also the sparseness of their social interaction, and their preference for involvement in the life of the community only on special occasions like Treaty Day, and the feasts around Christmas and at the start of the wild rice harvest. Other social occasions, such as the naming ceremony for children, were confined to members of the clan, and only rarely did they involve persons who were not relatives.

The settlement form of the old reserve was thus characterized by a clan-based residence pattern, with a wide margin of privacy and space separating the clans from each other. From the air, one would have observed a form that was circular, rather than linear, a kind of clustering in space around the center which was the Hudson's Bay island. Equality of access to the river was evidently a very important consideration, because the river was not only the main artery of transportation, but also a source of life-giving water and food. A critical element in the layout of the old reserve, moreover, was the need to have sufficient warning of the approach of strangers. Father Lacelle, the Oblate missionary, describes the security aspect of the spatial order in the following manner:

"The old reserve, well, it was so clean, and so well kept.... And there was no way to get to the old reserve, without someone knowing that a stranger was coming. There was, you see, a very clear line of vision at the old reserve, to protect unwanted visitors. I would also say that each house had a line of vision to the water as well, to know who was coming to visit. It was very important to the people of Grassy to have this security, and all the houses on the old reserve were located strategically.

Of course, it bothers them a lot on the new reserve that not every house has this line of vision, and that the whole reserve is not laid out in such a way that the approach of strangers can be noticed."<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Charlie Fobister, March 9, 1979.

<sup>7</sup> Father Lacelle, O.M.I., April 3, 1979.

Thus, space and social order, with attendant considerations for privacy, security, and equality of access to water were inextricably intertwined in the settlement form of the old reserve. While unspoken boundaries protected the residential areas occupied by individual clans, there was also communal space:

"Yes, we did have space that everybody shared on the old reserve. That was where the treaty hall was. Nobody made that area his home. That belonged to everybody, and everybody worked on it. Everybody helped build the treaty hall too; we cut the logs; we put it up, and we shared the cost of the windows and the stove."<sup>8</sup>

Other areas were communal in the sense that every family had the right in these areas to pick berries or harvest wild rice. Hunting territories were held in common as well; there were certain areas around the old reserve, however, which were particularly favoured, and therefore habitually exploited, by the same families year after year. Specific trapping grounds, on the other hand, were inherited; more precisely, the right to the use of these grounds was inherited, for there was no concept of individual ownership of land among the Ojibwa. Trapping grounds might be used by one extended family for several generations or for several years. "Richness of grounds and accessibility affected their desirability and continued use; sentimental ties affected their transfer."<sup>9</sup> In 1948, the Government of Ontario initiated a system of registered traplines wherein trappers were allocated exclusive trapping rights to specific areas of Crown land.<sup>10</sup> Because the boundaries of the registered traplines corresponded roughly to the areas that had been traditionally used and occupied

---

<sup>8</sup> Andy Keewatin, January 5, 1979.

<sup>9</sup> Ruth Landes, *Ojibwa Sociology* (New York: Columbia University Contributions to Anthropology, XXIX, 1937), p. 89-90.

<sup>10</sup> This meant that no one could trap without having a registered trapline, or without having permission from the holder of the trapline. These rights were renewable at the discretion of the Department of Lands and Forests (now the Ministry of Natural Resources), subject to the provision that the holder of the trapline had to harvest each year an agreed upon quota of fur from each species, particularly beaver. These quotas were imposed on all trapline holders, but were less strictly enforced for Treaty Indian trappers.

by Grassy Narrows families, the registration served to codify customary trapping areas. In short, while the relocation did not materially affect the people's concepts of communal space, it did alter fundamentally the traditional relationship between Ojibwa social order, based on clan territoriality, and settlement form.

It has already been suggested that the perception of space among the Ojibwa people could neither be defined simply by those attributes that could be captured by the physical senses nor contained by what was important at the level of pragmatic action. While the clan-based residence pattern and customary trapping grounds were very important elements in the way of life on the old reserve, the Indians still considered them as part of their material, everyday existence. Yet, as Hallowell has written:

"What appears to be particularly significant in our human adjustment to the world is that over and above pragmatic needs for orientation and without any pretense to reliable knowledge of regions of space outside their personal experience, human beings in all cultures have built up a frame of spatial reference that has included the farther as well as the more proximal, the spiritual as well as the mundane, regions of their universe."<sup>11</sup>

The people of Grassy Narrows, in their beliefs about the true nature of space and reality, constituted no exception to this general observation. The old people predicted, for example, that the move to the new reserve posed the gravest danger to the life of the community because of what could be perceived by the "inner senses", by the "eyes of the soul". The new site, they warned, was not spiritually suitable for human settlement. John Beaver explains:

---

<sup>11</sup> A. Irving Hallowell, "Cultural Factors in Spatial Orientation", p.188.

"The old Indians, they used to believe that there were certain land areas that were out of bounds for anybody to live on... In the Indian religion, there is good land, and land that is bad land. The land is not good for people to live on if the people who lived on it before did not use it right, or did not use their spiritual power in the right way. The old people used to preach that when a person dies, his spirit leaves the body and travels. If you are a bad person on earth, the spirit has trouble leaving the earth for the long journey into the other world. Instead, it stays in the same place where the person lived before and wanders about restlessly. So there is no such thing as empty space. All space is filled with spirits, but one cannot see them. Land over which troubled spirits travel is not good for people to live on...

But there are other spirits too and they live in certain places. These are different from the ones that have trouble reaching the 'happy hunting ground'. They possess certain spots and you have to be careful not to interfere with them. This land where we are now [the new reserve], this spot may be unfit for people to live on because it is already owned by a bad spirit. Maybe this is why there is so much trouble here."<sup>12</sup>

The old people of Grassy Narrows hold tenaciously to the belief that because other forms of consciousness inhabit the same space as man, it is essential to "know" the properties of space. According to Maryann Keewatin, a woman now in her late 60's, "the new reserve is a very bad place, spiritually." She still remembers her father telling her about "the evil spirit that runs the territory down here."<sup>13</sup> Ida Hyacinthe is another old woman, whose father and husband were once Chiefs of Grassy Narrows. She tells the story that both her father and her uncle saw someone surfacing at Garden Lake, and this was considered an extremely ominous sign:

....an evil spirit, for sure...the opposite of the Great Spirit. This was the sign of the presence of Machu-Manitou...The old people, they knew that

---

<sup>12</sup>

Interviews with John Beaver, December 1977, translated by Ivy Keewatin, and March 10, 1979, translated by Pat Loon.

<sup>13</sup>

Maryann Keewatin, March 11, 1979.

the new reserve was no good for our people, but nobody asked them, nobody listened to them...The old reserve was much better, spiritually. There was not so much sickness, so much death, there.<sup>14</sup>

The spirit-beings of the Ojibwa world did not only exist in the same space as man, but they occupied a characteristic spatial locale associated with a natural feature of the terrain like a set of cliffs or a body of water. They were not all evil, of course, and some were helpful to man. The Grassy Narrows people were very familiar with the abodes of the spirits and with their nature, as John Beaver explains:

"On the old reserve, the people used to believe that there is a spirit that dwells in those cliffs over there [pointing to a set of cliffs]. The way they would know this is to send out an echo. By the echo that comes back, they would know what they needed to know. Whenever the Indians heard something like that, they put a marker. And you can still see these markers on the old reserve. Sometimes you see paintings on rocks. These mean something; they were put there for a purpose. Now you can see this rock painting when you go up to Indian Lake. It's on the left hand side of the cliffs. And as you go towards Maynard Lake and Oak Lake, there's a channel there. You will see a painting there too.

The rock paintings where I told you mean that there is a good spirit there that will help us on the waters of the lake and the English River. You will see that there's a cut in the rocks over there; that's where people leave tobacco for the good spirit that inhabits that place.

On the old reserve, we also used to gather at the rock formation, "Little Boy Lying Down" they called it. From there they would send the echo across the space. They could tell by the strength of the echo that came back if the land was good. Good echoes meant that the land would give the people strength, that they could live well and survive there, that the land would support them.

Another way to tell whether the land was good, to live on was by the aura or the 'light' that comes off the land. The old people used to be able



to see this aura. Good land gives a special kind of light...The old people, they used to know all these things.

The place where the new reserve is, it is not a good place. It is not a place for life."<sup>15</sup>

Because space to the Ojibwa was never empty, but filled with spirit-beings whose existence was not dependent upon physical form, there were, therefore, better places than others to settle, to build houses, to live. There were certain points in space where the health and vitality of people would be strengthened, where, other things being equal, all beneficial conditions for life would seem to converge. By turning off the physical senses, and focusing the inner senses, certain gifted individuals could "see" the reality beyond the three-dimensional physical space and locate those points in space that would support life.<sup>16</sup>

It is, of course, not accidental that space, or land, chosen for its spiritual value was never deficient in its productive capacity. The land of the old reserve, for example, had fertile soil; it was rich in game; its waters were abundant with fish, and rice grew wild along the shores of the river. The Ojibwa considered all the objects of the natural world to be animated with the same life force as man, a life force whose source was the Great Spirit. A river to the Grassy Narrows people was "a living thing"; even rocks and stones, as well as trees, plants, and animals, had life.<sup>17</sup> Through the use of the inner senses, man could assess the potential

---

<sup>15</sup> John Beaver, December, 1977.

<sup>16</sup> In more modern terms, we can think of these points in space as amplification points for psychic and spiritual energy, or points where both ideas and matter will be more highly charged. These points can also be thought of as structural supports within the unseen fabric of energy that forms all reality. These special amplification points in space are also called "places of power".

<sup>17</sup> Another way to explain this principle of animation of all things in the universe is to think that the rocks, stones, rivers, plants, and animals are all formed by minute particles of consciousness that cannot be perceived by the physical senses. The atoms and molecules within these objects are bound by the same energy field as are the atoms and molecules of obviously living things, like the human body. As the human body derives its vitality from the spirit within, so too do these objects derive their motive power from the spirit within.

of his environment to support life.<sup>18</sup> As the spirit-beings could not be perceived by the physical senses, so too other objects in space required another source of perception in order to distinguish their true reality, and their special attributes and powers that could be helpful to man.<sup>19</sup> For the Ojibwa Indians generally, and for the Indians of Grassy Narrows in particular, there was not only no such thing as empty space; there was also no such thing as dead matter. All matter was related to the energy of the universe, and both man and nature were endowed with life from a single source, the Great Spirit.

Just as the choice of a site for human settlement on the basis of spiritual criteria was critical to the collective survival and well-being of the Band, so too were certain special places of extraordinary importance to individuals. These "places of power" were intensely personal

---

18

As the life of plants, for example, becomes the subject of research, there may be more of a scientific basis to the Indian belief of an "aura" than is first apparent. An "aura" concept has also become familiar to us through Kirilian photography. Certain people with special sensitivities can also see "auras" around the human body. The aura is a light wave phenomenon related to the energy field that cannot normally be seen by the naked eye.

19

Diamond Jenness, writing about the Ojibwa of Parry Island, discusses the principle of animation of all living things. He writes, however, of a tripartite division of beings, an elaboration that has not been suggested to me by anyone at Grassy Narrows. Further, the Grassy Narrows people do not speak in terms of a "soul", but rather use the word "spirit" to denote the life force in all things. Here is Jenness' description:

"Not only men, but animals, trees, even rocks and water are tripartite, possessing bodies, souls, and shadows....They all have a life like the life in human beings, even if they have all been gifted with different powers and attributes...Power means life, and life involves a soul and shadow. All things die. But their souls are reincarnated again, and what were dead return to life."

Diamond Jenness, The Ojibwa Indians of Parry Island, Their Social and Religious Life, (Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, 1935), pp. 20-21.

spaces, often distinguished by some physical configuration, a clump of trees, for example, or a certain rock pattern. Often these places required a special effort to get to, and were known only to the individual. Around the old reserve of Grassy Narrows, there were apparently many places like this where individuals went to be alone, where they could meditate, where they could most easily focus the inner senses. These micro-points in space also could be thought of as amplification points for psychic and spiritual energy, and perhaps this is why they have been called places of power. It is significant that there seem to be very few places of power in the immediate area of the new reserve.<sup>20</sup>

From everything that has been said so far, it should be apparent that "the true reality" of space to the people of Grassy Narrows was innocent of space as we know it. It was also not captured by time as we measure it. As with the orientation towards space, the people of Grassy Narrows knew that an equally valid reality of time could also be captured through the inner senses, and that the knowledge of this reality was fundamental to understanding one's Self, and one's place in the universe.

---

20

This follows from the appraisal of the new reserve as "spiritually bad land." Obviously "good" land for human settlement would, by definition, have places of power in the general area. There is, however, one place about four miles from the new reserve. From personal experience, it is a very special place and one which uplifts the spirit in ways both mysterious and profound. This space was pointed out to me, although it is customary among Indian people to keep such special places secret. While many other spiritual rituals are no longer practiced on the new reserve, yet I was aware that several individuals still practice solitude and meditation in certain "personal places", which have a special meaning for them.

### Orientation to Time

The orientation to time characteristic of the Western culture has been described well by Lewis Mumford:

"When one thinks of time, not as a sequence of experiences, but as a collection of hours, minutes and seconds, the habits of adding time and saving time come into existence. Time took on the character of an enclosed space; it could be divided, it could be filled up, it could even be expanded by the invention of labor-saving instruments."<sup>21</sup>

Time becomes a commodity that can be bought and sold, saved or spent, wasted, lost, or made up. Above all, it can be measured and its components aggregated. We have come to assume that there is a natural temporal order in the universe, and that the units of time as we know them follow a cyclical pattern measured by the time in which the earth completes one revolution in its orbit around the sun with respect to the fixed stars. Our sidereal year consists of 365 days, 6 hours, 9 minutes, and 9.54 seconds of solar time, and we progress to sidereal months, weeks, days, hours, minutes, and seconds with hardly a thought for the fact that our temporal bearings are products of our culture. We often assume that other people will not "waste time", and that speed will have the same value for them as it does for us. Time is certainly not just "a clock with a set of mechanical gears", but something God-given, and natural, an animating principle of the universe which we take for granted.

It therefore seems rather odd to us that as little as forty years ago, the old people at Grassy Narrows still went by the "time of the moon". According to Ida Hyacinthe (Ida is now 73 years old),

"We had a calendar, and it went by the moon. My dad kept it. It had animals to symbolize the

---

<sup>21</sup>

Lewis Mumford, Technics and Civilization, p. 198 as quoted in A. Irving Hallowell, "Temporal Orientation in Western Civilization and in a Preliterate Society", Culture and Experience, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1955), p. 217.

months, and it was a good way of telling time."<sup>22</sup>

Unlike our own perception of time, the "moon" to the Ojibwa was not a division of continuous time; rather, it was simply a recurring event. The moons were differentiated by names which referred to the seasonal appearance of certain animals, or to the condition of plant life during a particular season.<sup>23</sup> The cycle of the seasons was probably the most important mechanism by means of which the Ojibwa people kept themselves adjusted to the solar year. Further, the year was not a temporal unit of continuous duration that could be reduced to smaller measurable units; it was simply an interval of time between the recurring events of the seasons and it always began with the onset of winter. In short, the reference points for the perception of time by the Ojibwa were the seasons, because to them were tied all the economic and social activities of the annual cycle; within seasons were the moons which established certain regular intervals of time also tied to visible changes in nature. Then, within moons were other temporal units, days and nights measured not in standardized units of hours, but rather by alternating periods of light and darkness caused by the movements of the sun. For the purposes of everyday life, time was always related to chosen natural phenomena and their predictable recurrence. No other yardstick was necessary as long as the Ojibwa obtained a living from the land.

A major change in the temporal orientation of the people of Grassy Narrows occurred during the lifetime of people now in their 60's and 70's.

---

<sup>22</sup> Ida Hyacinthe, March 6, 1980.

<sup>23</sup> A. Irving Hallowell writes in detail about the Ojibwa lunar calendar. He explains that since in any solar year, there are more than twelve and less than thirteen lunations, the Indians used to add an unnamed moon to the series. The other moons were named. For example, the people of the Berens River named the spring moons according to the birds which made their appearance in the area at that time. Thus, Eagle, Goose, and Loon Moons correspond to our months of March, April, and May. A similar naming system may have been used by the Grassy Narrows people in representing their moons by the animals characteristic of a particular season. A. Irving Hallowell, "Temporal Orientation in Western Civilization and in a Preliterate Society", p. 226-227.

The old people at Grassy Narrows say that their entire way of life, including their ways of thinking about time and structuring their daily activities, changed with the relocation. They communicate their awareness of the change by differentiating between the "old" and the "new" reserves:

"Now, on the new reserve, we have to work from eight in the morning to four in the afternoon. They give us 'coffee-breaks' and a hour to eat dinner. I tell you, this is hard to get used to, and it makes no sense. Indians don't live that way. We eat when we're hungry. We eat when there's food, maybe somebody catch a fish. We're used to working when there's work to do...like we set nets at night and lift them in the morning. There was always work to do, but there was a time to do it. We used to live this way on the old reserve, but not anymore. Now they tell us what to do and when to do it."<sup>24</sup>

"Night", the period of darkness alternating with the period of light, also was once a convenient point of reference for the work of the "day":

"Early in the morning, before the sun come out, my grandmother would get me up. She believed that the sun was some kind of spirit. When the sun got up, then it was time for people to get up. It was time to start working. And when the sun went down, it was time to rest, to sleep. That's the way I was brought up.

But now, on the new reserve, you can see the kids running around all night. They sleep in the daytime. People have been mixed up. They don't know anymore what's day and what's night. Everything has changed since we moved to the new reserve."<sup>25</sup>

The hours of the day as such were of little practical importance to the old Ojibwa. There was not much need for sophisticated coordination of human activity by means of time, because family groups were relatively

---

<sup>24</sup>

Maggie Land and Charlie Fobister, November 26, 1978 and March 9, 1979, respectively.

<sup>25</sup>

John Beaver, March 10, 1979.

independent, and on the rare occasions of social gathering, the precision of the hour was irrelevant. Community meetings on the old reserve, for example, took place "when everyone came". The "moccasin telegraph" would inform the people of the meeting, and it would start when everyone was there. Similarly other social occasions, like dances or celebrations, would start when the people were "ready", although certain religious ceremonies had to take place at sunrise, and most conjuring activities were done after dark.<sup>26</sup> It appears that there were no occasions on the old reserve when the collective attendance of any group of people was demanded at a certain hour. On the whole, the temporal rhythm of life on the old reserve was elastic and gentle, flowing in response to physical necessity, external circumstances, or just whim. Time conceived in an abstract fashion, time assumed as autonomous, time thought of as infinitely divisible, time perceived as linear or sidereal, time treated as a commodity — these means of temporal orientation were alien to the Ojibwa culture. Western time perspectives became a dominant mode of individual and social orientation at Grassy Narrows only after the move to the new reserve.<sup>27</sup>

---

26

The sense of time which prompts people to begin activities "when the time is ripe and no sooner" seems to be characteristic of many Indian tribes, and Edward T. Hall elaborates on the sense of time among the Pueblo Indians and the Navajo in his book, The Silent Language (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959), pp. 31-41.

27

Among adults, Western time perspectives went hand-in-hand with the shift to on reserve wage labour and government-sponsored employment projects. Among children, however, orientations to time were profoundly influenced by television. Peggy Halcrow, the day care centre supervisor, knows this from personal experience:

"The kids here at Grassy Narrows have no concept of time. They can't tell time. The only way they know time is through TV programs. They will say, for example, 'Come to my house when Fonzy's on', or, 'We'll do this...after Mork and Mindy's over'...If I ask them when they went to bed, they will tell me that they went to bed after Johnnie Carson. If I say, come over at 7:00 p.m., they'll just stare at me blankly, and ask 'Is that before or after Mary Tyler Moore?' It has always amazed me that their entire concept of time is related to TV, and yet, the people only got electricity on the reserve in 1975...you sometimes wonder, how the kids ever managed to tell time before they got TV sets. But then, of course, things were altogether different. The way of life was Indian." Peggy Halcrow, January 19, 1980.

So far, then, the orientation to time by the Grassy Narrows people on the old reserve has been described as being largely dependent upon the recurrence and succession of concrete events, namely, the changing of the seasons, the alteration in the shape of the moon, and the movement of the sun. In their qualitative aspects, these events were the indications, preparatory symbols, and guides for vital social and economic activities during the life cycle. All these means of orientation were local, limited in their application to activities in the immediate future or the immediate past. All these means were also within the range of observation by the outer senses, and were phenomena well-known and dealt with in people's active experience.

As in their conceptualization of the reality of space, however, the people made a distinction between time as it could be perceived by the outer senses, and time as it could be known through the inner senses.<sup>28</sup> Knowledge of "the other reality of time" was just as important to human life as knowledge of the "separate reality of space". Time could be experienced as psychological time when conventional definitions of sequence and duration are suspended. The Ojibwa considered that personal awareness of this kind of time was fundamental to an understanding of the true nature of the Self and one's personal identity.

Based on what the people of Grassy Narrows have told me, two examples have been selected to illustrate the psychological implications of the relationship between the "inner" mode of temporal perception and the functioning of self-awareness in the individual human being. The first example speaks to the recollection of time past in time present that far transcends the limits beyond which we know reliable accounts of personal experience can be recalled. The second example illustrates the ability to experience time future in time present with respect to one's own life experience.

---

28

Obviously, spirit-beings that coexist with man in the same space are not subject to physical time; they do not age, and neither does the spirit in man.



A story told to me by Simon Fobister will serve to document the ability to reach back in time, beyond acceptable limits, for information to guide the development of the Self. Simon Fobister is now a young man of 23 years. He became Chief of Grassy Narrows at the age of 19, and from November 1976 to March 1980, he guided the community through three turbulent, violent, and exhausting years. He is, without question, a remarkably gifted young man, endowed with a unique intelligence, tremendous inner strength, and a sense of purpose in life granted to him in the following manner:

"When I was just a very small baby, maybe I was 8 or 9 months old because I was still wrapped up in cloth, my mother put me to sleep near a window in our log house on the old reserve.

When I was alone, I saw a very old, old woman quickly open the window, and take me away with her to where she lived.

When we entered her cabin, she put me down. Then she touched my eyes, and said that I will see. She touched my ears, and said that I would hear. She began to speak in words I could not understand; I could not understand her speech. But then I understood. She said that she was giving me a blessing so that one day I will be a leader of my people.

Much later in my life, I remembered this happening to me. I remembered what that woman had said to me very clearly. At first I thought it had all been a dream, but one which had left a very strong impression. So I asked my older sister whether she knew if I had ever been abducted as a baby. 'Yes,', she said. 'When you were a baby, an old woman took you away.' Then I knew that this was not a dream, that I remembered a real event in my life, one which had an important message for me."<sup>29</sup>

Simon Fobister's story, his conviction that it happened, illustrates the point that the phenomenal reality of self-awareness may be independent of

time as we know it. After all, we know that very early infant experiences cannot be recalled as such because the infant has not yet become an object to himself, nor has he incorporated any operational temporal sensor which makes possible the differentiation of very early experiences from later ones.<sup>30</sup> In the context of the importance granted by the Ojibwa culture to phenomena that are not bound by conventional means of perception, Simon Fobister's recollection would naturally be accepted as valid. Further, such self-related experiences need not be "true", according to anyone else's standards of truth or reliability, in order to be psychologically significant for the individual in understanding who he is, and what role he is to play in his society.

The second example illustrates the possibility of consciousness of future time in the present. A very common type of experience that has always been important to the Ojibwa as a source of knowledge about the Self is dreaming. In dreams, time and space as we know them are suspended.<sup>31</sup> Like Ojibwa people everywhere, the Grassy Narrows people also believe strongly that dream experiences are the experiences of the "inner man", and that therefore there is no inherent discontinuity between what is phenomenally real in dreams and what is real in waking life. Dreams always carry significant messages from the unconscious part of the Self, messages that should be incorporated into the experience of daily life.

---

30

A. Irving Hallowell, "The Self and Its Behavioral Environment", Chapter 4 in Culture and Experience, p. 95.

31

Hallowell makes the link between the "reality" of dreams and the "reality" of the spirit-beings that the Ojibwa believe in. He notes that the very fact that the Ojibwa can experience an enormously broadened mobility of self in space and in time while dreaming, is one reason why they can extend the same ability to mythological creatures in their own environment. "In the case of the Ojibwa," writes Hallowell, "human beings share such mobility with the non-human selves....Experientially, the world of the self and the world of myth are continuous." A. Irving Hallowell, "The Self and Its Behavioral Environment," p. 99.

Another category of time-suspended perception, similar to dreams in its source, but different from dreams in the sense that special preparation is required, is the vision.<sup>32</sup> On the old reserve, the Grassy Narrows people still practiced the tradition of encouraging young men to seek visions at the time of puberty. The "puberty vision quest" was considered fundamental to gaining knowledge of one's Self, one's identity and purpose in life, and one's special powers. Naturally, the perceptions acquired and experiences undergone by the individual during the vision quest might far transcend those of waking life with respect to spatial and temporal orientation. In the following story, there is for one moment a wondrous perception of the "other reality" of time: time indivisible into past, present, and future; time simultaneous.

"My father once told me this story...It was the custom of the old Indians to send boys out in the bush to prepare themselves for becoming a man. They had to be alone, and to fast, sometimes for a whole week... It was in the middle of winter when my father went into the bush. One day, after many days, he went out in the middle of a frozen lake. He was very cold, and very hungry, and he felt alone. Suddenly, he saw a whole bunch of people around him. Some were tall, and others were just little. Some he recognized, but many he did not know. The people, they just stood around him, and he saw their faces clearly. Then, as suddenly as they appeared, they disappeared.

Many, many years later, my father knew who those people were. They were us, his sons, and our children. He had seen all his family, four generations, his children, and his children's children... And he told me something I never forgot. He told me that all the past, present, and future is within all of us, now."<sup>33</sup>

---

32

There is a rich literature on the importance of dreams and the puberty vision quest in the Ojibwa culture. Among the best sources of additional information are: Diamond Jenness, The Ojibwa Indians of Parry Island, Their Social and Religious Life, (Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, Bulletin No. 78, 1935); Edward S. Rogers, The Round Lake Ojibwa (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, Occasional Paper 5, 1962; Rev. S.A. Sieber, S.V.D., The Saulteaux Indians (St. Boniface, Manitoba: The Provincial House, 1948).

33

Normally, it is forbidden to speak of the knowledge gained from the vision quest, particularly if the person is granted some special power or skill from his guardian spirit. In the example above, the information is notably limited only to time perception. Conversation with Pat Loon, March, 1979.

Although some people still believe in dreams as a source of knowledge about the Self, the vision quest is no longer practiced on the new reserve. There appears to be a sharp discontinuity between the old and the new reserves regarding the traditional ways of teaching the young about the nature of the world around them. The young people of Grassy Narrows are caught between "our ways" and the "old ways" of "seeing" and "believing"; they have no bearings in either camp.

In summary, the material that has been presented on the orientation to time and space characteristic of the old reserve way of life has emphasized the differences between the Indian culture and our own. In the Indians' belief in a reality separate from that which could be perceived by the physical senses alone, they challenged our assumption that an "objective" world exists independently of our own creation and perception of it. In their conviction that this reality contained important information for ordering human settlement in space, or for guiding individual experience in time, they extended immensely the range of possibilities open to them as human beings. Yet, in practical terms, their conceptions of time and space also satisfied certain everyday requirements in the pursuit of livelihood and in the preservation of the social order.

The relocation disrupted the way of life, and under the fundamentally changed conditions imposed by government planners, the traditional Ojibwa orientations to time and space lost their basis and their value. Just as the people's bearings in time and space were weakened, so too were other culturally significant ways of grounding the individual to his life, to the people around him, to his family and community. The old reserve way of life in terms of the individual's relationship to society is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 5.

MAN AND SOCIETY: RELATIONSHIPS IN TRANSITION

When the people of Grassy Narrows speak of the nature of their society on the old reserve, they invariably begin by describing their close ties to their family, to the grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, and cousins that formed the community of residence on the winter trapline and in the summer encampment. The strong emphasis given to the family is not surprising. In the way of life based on trapping, the Ojibwa family came to assume an importance unlike anything known in less isolated settings. During those long, lonesome stretches of time on the winter trapping grounds, the family group, for all practical purposes, became a community unto itself: it was an industry, a school, a hospital, a shrine. The bonds of family on the old reserve were very close, because the extended family had the responsibility of providing for the physical survival of its members, educating the young, sheltering the dependent, curing the ill, and transmitting the moral and spiritual values of the culture. In a society with very few public institutions and no formal associations, the membership of the individual in a family unit was the primary source of identity and support. The family was the point from which the individual could fix his place in a larger visible and invisible universe.

In the summer months on the old reserve, when the trapping families settled into their customary clan territories around the shores of the English Wabigoon river, the "community" of Grassy Narrows took on the appearance and shape of a larger collective unit. Certain powers and responsibilities related to the welfare of the Band as a whole were exercised by the institution of the Chief and Band Council. The clan-based family groups, however, retained their authority, comprehensive functions, and fierce independence. This situation characterized community life until the time of the relocation.

The following discussion of relationships and social institutions characteristic of the way of life on the old reserve is structured around

those themes that have surfaced over and over again in my conversations with people about their life experience. It is not a comprehensive account, because too little attention is paid to the very complex and unique kinship system of the Ojibwa.<sup>1</sup> Instead, the themes that are developed here are those that are significant in terms of the changes that have occurred as a result of the relocation and the ever-increasing intervention of government in community life. Certainly for those people who had lived on the old reserve for most of their lives, or who spent their formative years there, the new reserve is a different and scarcely comprehensible place. It is a universe ruled by haphazard and capricious forces beyond the control of any individual or social unit. Thus, people often cannot speak of the "way of life on the old reserve" without some reference to their present condition. When they do speak, however, it is with a great deal of emotion because the core institution of the old reserve, the family, no longer functions to orient the individual to the social order or to guide his progress in life. Outside the context of the trapping economy, the Ojibwa family could no longer exist in the same form. Its structure and functions, the roles and responsibilities of each family member, had to change and adapt to new conditions. In the process, many of the rituals practiced by the family to mark the stages of life, the passages in the cycle from birth to death, disappeared.

---

1

A number of anthropologists have made detailed investigations of the Ojibwa social structure and kinship system. The Ojibwa sharply delineate two categories in their kinship terminology: (1) kinsmen are patrilineal relatives (father's brother's family, brother's family, and brother's son's family) and materterlateral relatives (mother's sister's nuclear family) - these are relatives; (2) non-kinsmen are all others in the society, and are literally not related. This dichotomy of kin and non-kin is absolute and has important implications for marriage. For extensive treatment of the subject, see R.W. Dunning, Social and Economic Change among the Northern Ojibwa (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959), pp. 71-108; and, Edward S. Rogers, The Round Lake Ojibwa (Toronto: Department of Lands and Forests for the Royal Ontario Museum, 1962), pp. B10-B81.

### The Indian Family

The concept of "family" on the old reserve was a broad one. The very term, nintipe.ncike.win, was sometimes used to refer to any group involving a leader and his followers.<sup>2</sup> In everyday life, the concept of "family" always related to the community of residence on the trapline, composed of those who worked together and who were bound by responsibility and friendship as well as by ties of kinship. Ideally, the family might consist of several males and dependent females, patrilineally related under the leadership of the eldest male. The core of the group might be two or more brothers and their families, or a man and his sons and their families, in addition to single persons attached to the group. The total size of this family might average from 20 to 25 persons.<sup>3</sup> In the summer, this family group would take on a separate physical identity in space. It would be seen as a cluster of houses or tents, like a family compound, with each cluster about one-half or at least one-quarter of a mile apart on the shores of the English-Wabigoon river. In the winter, members of the group would go to the family's trapping grounds. In this group, there would be a continual degree of economic cooperation and sharing. The men might hunt and trap together and certain tasks, like house-building or repair, would be performed cooperatively. Sharing and mutual aid was always expected and performed within this group. The extended family was both the largest unit of economic cooperation and the

---

2

Edward Rogers states that the term literally means "those whom I lead", and therefore if the context is hunting, a man might use the term to refer to all members of his hunting group. The most common context, however, is that of kinship, referring to a group of kinsmen for whom a man is responsible. These are determined according to a number of principles: the first is that of patrilineal descent; the second involves the solidarity of brothers, i.e. an older brother is responsible for his younger full brothers and their descendants; the third relates to the dependency of women, where unmarried and widowed women are under the care of the father first, then brothers, and sometimes sons. These principles provide the means of determining, in theory, the composition of the Ojibwa family. Edward S. Rogers, The Round Lake Ojibwa, p. B82.

3

Dunning makes the distinction between this family group, or extended family, and the household, or nuclear family, by calling the first group a "co-residential group" and the second group, a "commensural unit". R.W. Dunning, Social and Economic Change among the Northern Ojibwa, p. 55.

most important group for social interaction and socialization of children because many important social activities, like the naming of a child or a feast for the dead, were arranged by this group. On the old reserve, there were very few social occasions during the year that were organized by the Band as a whole.

In many significant respects, it would appear that the extended family functioned as a total institution in the life of an individual on the old reserve. From all accounts of family life, the family seemed to be self-sufficient in terms of the skills it needed to ensure the survival and well-being of its members. The bonds of the family were very close because people worked together, and everyone in the family had a place and a role to play. These characteristics of family life on the old reserve, and the changes in family life as a result of the move to the new reserve, are very well expressed in the following excerpt from a conversation with Art Assin, a man of 41 years. Art Assin feels very strongly that he is a man "caught between two cultures...two ways of life", and that he has a foothold in neither the old ways nor the new. Like most men and women in his generation, he is an extremely heavy drinker. During the last two years, he has on several occasions tried to stop drinking.

"I was born on the trapline, and I grew up on the trapline, in the bush. Trapping was our culture. Trapping kept the family together because everyone in the family had something to do; the man had to lay traps and check them; the woman skinned the animals, cooked, and looked after the children. The grandparents helped with the children; they used to teach them manners, how to behave, and tell them stories about our culture. The children, if they were old enough, also had work to do. They had to set snares for rabbits, and to chop wood.

Now, on the new reserve, we can't trap as a family anymore. The woman has to stay home because the children are in school on the reserve. The man has to go out in the trapline by himself. But he



gets lonely there and doesn't like to do all the work by himself. So he comes back to the reserve and tries to find a job here or he goes on welfare. At least in the days of residential school, we could still trap as a family, but no more. You can see that only a few people are trapping nowadays.

What happens now is that the men, if they have a job, go to work in the morning, and the women are left in the house alone. They don't share in the work anymore. They buy cans at the store, and have nothing to do in the daytime. The kids also don't do chores anymore. The old people don't teach the kids how to behave...In my generation, marriages are breaking up. Families are breaking up, and the kids are sniffing gas while their parents are drinking. This is happening because people don't work together anymore. Trapping was not just an occupation for the men. It was a way of life for the whole family. With the school on the reserve, we just can't live like we used to. If you divide the family in work, you tear it apart in other ways as well."<sup>4</sup>

The idea that "if you divide the family in work, you tear it apart in other ways as well" is one which Grassy Narrows people understand and often express. The women, in particular, feel downgraded as a result of not being able to share in the work of the men. A notable characteristic of family life on the old reserve, the cooperation and equality of importance between men and women, no longer applies. Further, husbands and wives were perhaps less bonded by strong emotional attachments than by a well-understood balance of rights and duties on the part of each partner. It is not surprising, therefore, that the old order of respect between spouses was eroded as the mutual obligations on which it rested became irrelevant under the changed economic conditions of the new reserve. Men and women found it difficult, on the basis of past habits, to determine what their own roles should be. Children were also caught in the disorientation. On the old reserve, every age had its appropriate

---

<sup>4</sup>

Art Assin, March 26 and 27, 1979; translated by Pat Loon.

tasks. What a parent owed his offspring was clear; the child had to be fed, clothed, and housed; it had to be imbued with beliefs important for continued membership in the community. The obligations of the young were equally plain: they were to obey the adults and assist in the labour of the family as a whole. Parents, and especially grandparents, were indulgent with the children, teaching by example and experience rather than by discipline. The role of grandparents in transmitting to the young the values of the culture was an extremely important one. The entire generation in their mid-30's and 40's who spent some time in residential school came back to the old reserve to learn the old ways from the parents and grandparents. Cognizant of the fact that the young were subject to alien influences in the residential schools, the parents and grandparents made a special effort to teach their children the Indian values and traditional skills. Archie Land, a man now in his mid-40's, is representative of the generation that still was formed by the extended family:

"I was only 13 years old when I lost my dad. I was in residential school since I was seven years old, and I was there for nine years. When I got out of the residential school, I knew nothing of Indian ways. We had to talk English at school and learn how to farm...But old Robert Land, he took me and showed me how to hunt, and how to trap. He taught me about our Indian ways. He taught me how to respect people. In those days, the old people made sure that the kids who came back from residential school knew all these things. They taught from the heart and the kids learnt from the heart, and from watching how other people lived."<sup>5</sup>

Based on what the people of Grassy Narrows say, it is clear that the extended family of the old reserve did not survive the transplantation to the new reserve. Given the interlocking of social order and economic life, neither its structure nor its functions could be maintained outside the trapping way of life. Father Lacelle confirms this:

---

<sup>5</sup>

Archie Land, February 4, 1979.

"When I used to know the Grassy Narrows families on the old reserve, and I knew them well over a period of maybe 35 years, it seemed to me that the clan had much more control over the upbringing of children and especially over the stability of the family as a whole. Within each family, the elders kept a sharp watch over the proper upbringing of the young people, and they were the ones who gave them spiritual training.

Now I see the families breaking up. Marriages aren't what they used to be. Not that people didn't separate, because they did, but there wasn't so much fighting, so much drinking. I believe that all this is because the people no longer work together, like in trapping, and also because the pressures they're under now are just too great.

First of all, the women used to do their share of the work; this has been disrupted. Second, the grandparents used to help raise the children. Now it's all on the mother. She's under too much stress. If there's a problem she can't handle, she doesn't have the support of the whole clan like she used to. Third, the way in which the government put all the houses on the new reserve doesn't help either, because now the relatives are scattered all over the reserve, and it's impossible to live like extended family groups used to. And then, finally, there's the man, the husband. If he can't provide for his family because there's no job on the reserve, if he has to go on welfare, well, that surely causes him to lose pride. Indian people like to be able to provide for themselves, like they've always done. So, he begins to fight with his wife, and they both begin to drink.

In this situation, the children are growing up with no training, no guidance whatsoever. You can see that yourself. There is a great permissiveness on the reserve today, and no one cares to teach spiritual values. When the parents drink, the children suffer deeply. There is no question about it. There has been a tremendous deterioration in family life after the move to the new reserve."<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, there now seems to be little connection between the concept of the extended family of the old reserve, based on the winter trapping settlement and the summer family compound, and the nuclear family or household that emerged under the unpropitious physical and economic setting of the new reserve.

In concluding this brief outline of family life before the relocation, it is worth speculating whether or not it might be possible for the people of Grassy Narrows to return to the trapping way of life, assuming that alternative arrangements can be made for the schooling of their children. Art Assin's perspective on this issue is relevant. He reminds us that it is the quality of integration between material and non-material aspects of life that is now missing from the way of life on the new reserve:

"Is it possible to go back to the trapline as a family? To keep the trapping culture? I don't think so, even if the kids could go to a boarding school...Now, I would be afraid to leave my wife and small children in a small log cabin on the trapline, while I went out for 2 or 3 days...They may take sick, and what do I do? You see, in the old days, our people were much stronger, physically. They were eating a different kind of food, not cans, but fresh wild meat, fish, wild rice. And besides that, every family had someone who knew about medicine, who could heal with bark or roots or herbs and other things. Every family on the trapline had someone who knew about the healing power of each tree or bush, who had the 'power' to use things to help the members of the family. So the trapping families made their own medicine and took care of themselves. They were independent of your doctors and nurses.

And now? We have lost that knowledge of healing, and we no longer have healers in our families. We are also weaker physically from eating your kind of food and not having as much wild meat. So, I would be afraid of leaving my family in the bush. Your kind of first-aid would not help us in the bush.

One more thing. When we lived, as families, on the old reserve, we had our spiritual elders. Every family had its own spiritual person, someone who could solve all kinds of problems, who could help persons trap better and be more successful as hunters. He had 'power' to apply to all areas of human existence. For other things, there were other medicine men who had even greater power and could help in other ways.

Now, this religion is missing from the new reserve. There is no knowledge, no 'power' being passed from one generation to the next. Now we have nothing. Not the old, not the new. Our families are all broken up. We are caught in the middle...between two cultures, two ways of life."<sup>7</sup>

On the new reserve, many of the responsibilities once carried out by the extended family, for example, providing for the physical welfare of family members, curing the ill, and sheltering the dependent, have been thrust upon an impersonal bureaucracy. Agencies of the federal and provincial governments now deliver economic and housing programs, and medical and social services. In one critical area, however, the role of the family has not been, and can never be, replaced. For many older people, especially for the women of Grassy Narrows, the discontinuity in the practice of customs and rituals marking the stages of life is one of the most widely lamented manifestations of the breakdown in family life. Although in some degree the rituals of death are still respected on the new reserve, many other ceremonial observances of life's stages have fallen into disuse. Yet no one can deny their importance in the process of identity formation, a process by which each individual member of the society derives some measure of his stature as a social being. Although the following discussion of these ceremonies is not exhaustive, their inclusion owes much to the wish of the Grassy Narrows women to convey this aspect of their way of life on the old reserve.

---

<sup>7</sup>

Art Assin, March 26 and 27, 1979. Translated by Pat Loon.

### Life Cycle Rituals and Identity

The first significant ritual in the life of an individual on the old reserve was the naming ceremony. Corresponding in some ways to the baptismal rite, this ceremony usually occurred in the first year of a child's life. It was always performed when a baby became ill, although the child's illness was not a precondition for this ritual. For this ceremony, the parents asked an old man or woman to bestow a name on the child. This chosen person had to be in good health and possess high repute in the community as a spiritual leader. The Ojibwa people believed that by granting the child a name, the old person was bestowing on the child the blessings of the manitos, or deities, that he had received during a long lifetime. They also believed that the old person could share his life with the child, and thus grant it added duration and strength. Maryann Keewatin, a woman of 67 years who had this ceremony performed for six of her eight children, describes the ritual as follows:

"When a child is sick, we used to call an old man and ask him to dream about the child. This man had to know how to dream; he had to have special power.

The family would be busy preparing for a feast: meat, bannock, wild rice. Then, on the day of the ceremony, people would come and sit in a circle and ask the old man to sing a song and give the baby a name. The old man would hold the baby in his hands. After he gave the name, he kissed the baby and handed it to everybody in the circle, and they kissed it too. Then the family would have a feast."<sup>8</sup>

Pat Loon, who was present at many naming ceremonies, adds greater detail to Maryann's description:

"I was there when Maryann Keewatin gave this ceremony to her daughter, Evelyn. The Indians call it ogwineans.

The family usually made some home brew the day before. Then they called this old man, David Land; that was Charlie Fobister's father-in-law.

The ceremony had to take place early in the morning, before the sun is completely up. And so, on the day of the naming, the old man came into the house just as the light of the day was breaking. Everybody else came in at about the same time.

The old man had a makwah, like a rattle with bear claws and bells. He took the child in his arms, and then the family passed the home brew around. Everybody drank from the same cup until it was all gone. Then they passed the tobacco around. The Indians, they used home brew on special occasions, but tobacco always had some religious meaning. After that, the old man began to sing songs and to shake the rattle. Then he kissed the child and said, 'I give you part of my life.' And then everybody kissed the child. And she got a name like Loud Thunder.

The naming ceremony is a beautiful ceremony because the old man breathes life into the child, shares his life with the child."<sup>9</sup>

Maryann Keewatin laments the fact that this ritual has died out at Grassy Narrows. She says that the last time she attended the naming ceremony was on the old reserve.<sup>10</sup> She does not know why the naming ceremony is no longer practiced, and she is deeply concerned that none of her 35 grandchildren have been properly named. She says she has a "heavy heart" on this account.

As the young child moved into adolescence on the old reserve, parents and grandparents prepared it for the second major rite of passage: the puberty vision quest. Both girls and boys were urged to dream and to remember their dreams, although the institutionalized vision quest does not seem to have been as clearly defined for the girls as it

---

<sup>9</sup> Pat Loon, March 10, 1979.

<sup>10</sup> According to Sam Keesick, the Taypaywaykejick family still keeps the memory of the naming ceremony alive. Although the ceremony is no longer performed by a medicine man (all the recognized medicine men have died), the practice of asking old people to name the child remains, at least in this family. It is difficult to assess to what extent the spiritual context of the ritual has been preserved.

was for the boys. According to the older women of Grassy Narrows, their ritual of passage into womanhood placed more emphasis on the aspect of seclusion, because the Indians believed that every woman was possessed of a mysterious power at the time of her first blossoming into womanhood, a power that was dangerous to men, and that could also spoil the harvest. Maryann Keewatin, who went through this ritual, as did all her sisters, describes it in the following manner:

"On the old reserve, when a girl would first menstruate, she would be taken away from people ...she would be taken out to the bush, to her own tent. If it was the summertime, the older women would go out and pick berries — raspberries, blueberries, strawberries — whatever they could find. They mix the berries with black ash, and sometimes wild rice too...The girl had to eat this, so that she would not spoil anything.<sup>11</sup>

The Indians believed that the girl had the power to ruin the crops that were planted in the spring or the berries that grew wild. She was given very little food and encouraged to obtain a vision during the week or so that she was in seclusion. Although Maryann's generation of women experienced this ritual, and she herself put her two oldest daughters through it, the custom was not carried over to the new reserve.<sup>12</sup> The last known rite of passage into womanhood was held on the old reserve in 1962.

Not by coincidence, the boys' rite of passage into adulthood was last experienced by the generation of men now in their 50's and 60's. Men like Steve Loon, 63 years old, and his brothers remember being sent out into the bush to fast and to seek a vision. Of all the life cycle

---

<sup>11</sup> Maryann Keewatin, January 16, 1978.

<sup>12</sup> Maryann offered this explanation for why the ritual was not carried out for all her daughters. She said that after her husband, David Assin, died she had to go to work at Delaney Lodge during the summertime. Because she worked every day as a cabin maid, she could not take care of the daughter who was supposed to be in isolation and who, therefore, needed special attention. The custom was never again revived in her family or in her children's families.



ceremonies arranged by the family, the puberty vision quest was the most important. Like other Indian people on the continent, the Grassy Narrows people also made this ritual the cornerstone of the process of an individual's identity formation. This is because they believed that a human being did not begin life with powers and full identity. These came, in the first instance, from the blessings with which the child was endowed during the naming ceremony, and more importantly, from the powers acquired through the puberty fast when an individual gained the aid of a guardian spirit, a manito or pawaganak. The manitos were the sources of the Ojibwa's existence, entities who ruled the universe. Without their aid, without their blessings and protection, man was helpless; he could not achieve success in life. Success, symbolized by hunting achievement, good health, ability to divine and to cure, and above all, a long life, could come only as a gift from the manitos. To the traditional Ojibwa,

"All those talents and traits of character which we think of as functions of a total personality are regarded by the Ojibwa as isolated, objective items which may be acquired in the course of life by individuals who are fortunate enough to coerce them from the supernaturals. In Ojibwa thought, there is no original and absolute 'Self'; a person freshly born is 'empty' of characteristics and of identity. Consequently, tremendous pressure is exerted upon a young person to pursue the supernaturals and move them to fill up his 'emptiness'."13

In addition to its social value, the puberty vision quest was also an intensely personal religious experience. If the individual were fortunate enough to make contact with a spiritual guardian and obtain special powers, the encounter might form the basis for subsequent spiritual experiences; at least it would establish the channels and criteria for the perceiving and judging of other-than-physical phenomena.<sup>14</sup>

---

13 Ruth Landes, The Ojibwa Woman (New York: AMS Press, 1971), p. 124.

14 Not everyone who sought a vision was necessarily successful. Some had to try more than once; in other cases, visions were considered dangerous or useless. It was the duty of parents or grandparents to carefully monitor the visions, and guide the young person in interpreting the messages received.

We know very little about the puberty fast as it was practiced at Grassy Narrows. It was a personal matter and the individual was prohibited, by custom, from disclosing any details with respect to the experience. The Ojibwa believed that the knowledge and powers granted to the young person during the vision would be rendered useless if the identity of the manito were to become known and the contents of the vision made public. What we do know about this practice comes from fragments of conversations.<sup>15</sup> We know, for example, that women were not exhorted as much as were the boys to make a long vision fast; for the young men, of course, the experience was considered crucial to success in life. We know that the fast took place over a number of days, perhaps seven to ten days, and was held in a secluded spot with the spiritual leader of each extended family group presiding over the ritual. We also know that this ritual, which was once considered so fundamental to the Ojibwa identity and spiritual awakening, died out at Grassy Narrows at the time of the present grandparents' youth. According to Father Lacelle:

"The Grassy Narrows people...they had beautiful ceremonies on the old reserve that influenced their whole lives. The most important of these was the ceremony of 'taking responsibility for your life', the ceremony that took place when the young man was 'ready' for a religious experience; the Indians used to say, 'when his soul was awakened'. This was the time of the fast and preparation for vision.

The people thought that we, the missionaries, did not understand, did not approve. When I think back on those days, I think that maybe we did not understand. Anyway, what happened was that the old people, they just gave up. They stopped teaching and guiding the young, and as I said before, there is no spiritual training at all on the new reserve."<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup>

We have a partial account of the puberty fast from Pat Loon, quoted earlier in this paper with reference to temporal perception (p. 116). Maggie Land also mentions it (p. 92), but detailed autobiographical accounts are rare.

<sup>16</sup>

Father Lacelle, O.M.I., April 3, 1979.

From the time of puberty to the time of death, no other ritualistic observances equalled the naming and puberty ceremonies in importance for demarcating life's stages and shaping individual identity. The rituals of marriage were not considered to be of great consequence in traditional Ojibwa society. Much more serious concerns than the marriage ceremony were the conditions under which marriage took place.

Many older Grassy Narrows women cannot understand how, in the span of one generation, the entire foundation of customary man-woman relationships could be so radically undermined. "The young people today, they just shack up with anybody...they do things that used to be forbidden," says Maggie Land. Most alarming for the older generation is not the fact that young people are "just living together"; according to custom, men and women who live together are considered to be married. What troubles older people in the community is the disregard being demonstrated for one of the most powerful traditional taboos regulating sexual relations: the taboo prohibiting relations with close kin or persons "of the same blood". From all accounts of life on the old reserve, it appears that violations of this taboo were extremely rare. Because of the peculiar characteristics of the kinship system, this taboo extended to relations with parallel cousins. Cross-cousin marriage, however, was not only permitted but favoured, particularly among the Lake of the Woods and the English River Ojibwa.<sup>17</sup> In an older tradition, which

---

17

In the Western kinship system, it is customary to classify all the children of one's aunt and uncle on both sides of the family as cousins. The Ojibwa, however, make a distinction among cousins that we do not make. They consider that a man can marry his "cross-cousin", namely, the daughter of his mother's brother or his father's sister, because these women are not related to him. He cannot marry his "parallel cousin", namely, the daughter of a mother's sister, or of his father's brother. These women were considered as closely related to him as his own sister. Although all the Ojibwa make the same identifications in their kinship terminology, not all Ojibwa Bands favour cross-cousin marriage. In her study of the Emo in southwestern Ontario, Ruth Landes found that the Emo Band forbid marriage between relatives, while the Kenora Ojibwa strongly preferred cross-cousin marriage. Ruth Landes, Ojibwa Sociology (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), pp. 52-62.

had lost much of its force earlier in the century, the totem clan affiliation precluded marriage among members of the same clan.<sup>18</sup> Incest, sexual relations between mother and son, father and daughter, or brother and sister, was also prohibited by the same taboo that governed relations with kin. Cases of incest on the old reserve, as compared to the number of cases of incest on the new reserve (most often in the context of an alcoholic binge), were exceptions to the general rule.

Generally, then, there were strict social codes attached to the choice of a marriage partner on the basis of his/her kinship affiliation. There were also certain pragmatic considerations and guidelines to follow in the process of courtship. It was not unusual on the old reserve for marriages to be arranged by parents on the basis of certain ideals in the character of the prospective spouse. Industriousness in both sexes, and spiritual 'power' in the male sex, were especially appreciated. Maryann Keewatin explains:

"In my days, it was very important that the parents accept the boy. First of all, he had to be a good hunter and a good trapper. He had to be able to provide for his family. Then, he had to have everything ready for the family; he had to have a house. And, he had to be from a good family.

---

<sup>18</sup> In 1948, Father Sieber published his study of the Saulteaux of northwestern Ontario, which included Grassy Narrows. He recorded 13 totems, or totemic clans, on the Grassy Narrows reserve: Caribou, lynx, loon, sturgeon, bear, eagle, moose, kingfish, bullhead, pelican, mallard duck, rattlesnake, and common snake. (Only the first seven totems have survived in the contemporary setting). The totem was passed by the father to his descendants; the woman did not lose her clan affiliation at marriage, but she did not pass it to any of her children. Although the clan system as a formal means of social organization is believed to have disappeared somewhere in the nineteenth century, what did remain until recently was the strong feeling of close kinship and solidarity between members of the same totemic clan. One could always turn to one's clan-mates in times of need, but marriage between members of the same totem was forbidden. In the 1940's, Sieber had already observed that with regard to marriage customs, "the most outstanding decline took place in the matter of clan exogamy...the disregard of totemic clan affiliations."

Rev. S.A. Sieber, S.V.D., The Saulteaux Indians (St. Boniface, Manitoba: The Provincial House, 1948), p. 51-53.

In my time, the woman brought the boy she wanted to marry to her house. They would sleep together, but not like when you would have a baby [no sex] until the parents accept the boy. After that, they were married. Also, we did not get married when we were so young, not like nowadays. I was 26 when I first got married and my husband was 30 years old.

There was no feast when people got married, only sometimes when they moved to a new house. And in those days, most people waited until the priest came, and then they were married by the church."<sup>19</sup>

Both the Chief and Council and the Indian Agent tried to make people stick to their marriages, yet no formalities were ever associated with separation; the disaffected spouse simply walked out of the marriage. Maryann Keewatin:

"The Chief and Council were closer to the people in those days. One day, I had a quarrel with my husband and I ran away from my husband. The Chief and all three of his Councillors went out to look for me. They found me, and talked to me, and told me to go home again. They also talked to my husband. And things were better. If something like this happened on the old reserve, if somebody beat up his wife, then the Chief and Council took on the responsibility to make things between them better.

But if people really couldn't get along, there was no problem...the man or woman would just leave the house and not come back."<sup>20</sup>

The difference in the customs and traditions of courtship and marriage between the old and the new reserve is always emphasized in any discussion about family life. To what extent the past is idealized is difficult to judge, although an element of nostalgia undoubtedly exists. What is perhaps more important is that the Grassy Narrows people perceive the difference to be related to the disorganizing pressures of the new reserve environment. The following excerpt is typical of many conversations on the subject:

"Yes, the Indian Agent on the old reserve did try to make people stick to their marriages, and so did the Chief and Council. And most people then were married

---

<sup>19</sup> Maryann Keewatin, January 16, 1978.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

by the church, even though they were already married when they first started to live together. And you just didn't change your partner when you wanted to. You had to have a reason, a good reason.

Now look at the situation today. After they moved here, that's when people really started to live common-law and break up whenever they wanted to. In the last 20 years, you will find a big difference. The young people are shacking up much earlier than before. At the age of 12 or 13, just after puberty. They don't feel that they need to have any life experience...they can go on welfare. Now, before a woman gets to be 30 years old, she may have had two or three husbands, and children from each of them. Or she goes with a man when she's been drinking, has a child, and doesn't know who the father is.

This never happened before, and I'm not that old. There used to be some restriction on family life. For one thing, it was a kind of crime to have a baby without a definite father...you couldn't get your child registered as a status Indian under the Indian Act if you didn't know who the father was. Now that was a restriction. When I was growing up on the old reserve, during 10 years, I know of only two children born without a definite father, and in both cases, the Chief and his Councillors went around and demanded to know who the father was.

In my opinion, if people had been able to stay on the old reserve, and keep living in their own way, well, maybe some of these changes would have happened, but it would have taken much longer, and they would not have happened to the same extent."<sup>21</sup>

The rituals around naming or puberty, the customs around marriage, these ways of "knowing" and "being" do not persist in a society unless they work economically, socially, psychologically, and spiritually. In some ways, their absence on the new reserve is a measure of the extent to which the integration of the material and non-material aspects of life has become dysfunctional under fundamentally changed conditions. Indeed, the only rituals that have survived the relocation are the rituals for death.

---

<sup>21</sup>

Pat Loon, March 17, 1979, at Grassy Narrows.

The rituals of death expose most clearly the Ojibwa Indian conception of the nature of man. The Ojibwa believe that neither man nor any other living being can exist without a soul; the soul is the absolutely essential attribute of all classes of animate beings. As sheer energy, the soul is independent of any particular physical form; it can transform itself into matter and take any desired form. Thus, all animate beings, including man, have the inherent potential of a multiform appearance, and the very existence of man's "Self" is therefore, by definition, not coordinate with his bodily existence in the ordinary sense. Embedded in this basic belief is the idea that the soul of man can detach itself from the physical body at will, and can transcend time and space as we know it. The soul does this at death and during dreaming, and herein lies the conceptual connection between the rituals of death and the rituals of puberty. On both occasions, the soul detaches itself from the body to occupy a different position in time and space. The difference is that in the case of dreaming, or the vision quest, the separation of the soul from the physical body is a temporary one; at death, the separation is permanent and the soul never returns to the physical body, but begins the journey to the Land of the Dead. Death to the Ojibwa is simply a change of form, a metamorphosis. A person cannot die, as long as it is assumed that a soul continues to exist, that the soul is indeed eternal. Death claims only the physical body, the external form; the continuity of the Self, therefore, is maintained.

The rituals of death described below are more easily understood if we can also share the Ojibwa assumption that the soul has functionally the same generic attributes as the physical Self in life. The soul of the living and the dead knows who it is, where it is in space and time; it is conscious of past, present, and future experiences; it has a capacity for volition; and, it needs nourishment and protection against more powerful spirit-beings. Thus, for three nights and three days, the souls of the living guard the soul of the dead against any malevolence from other powers during the journey to the Land of the Dead. The soul of the dead is protected by the beating of drums and quiet chanting. At the funeral feast, food and tobacco are burned and offered to the soul of

the dead, and certain objects special to the person in life are buried with the body. A medicine man, for example, is always buried with his medicine bag. These rituals are rarely unobserved, even on the new reserve:

"After a person dies, it is our custom to sit with the body of the deceased for three nights. The relatives take turns sleeping, but there are always some people who are awake. The body cannot be left unguarded in case the soul of the person is snatched away by evil spirits before it has a chance to embark on its journey. During the night, someone will beat the drum and people sing special songs. Of course, the body is guarded during the day as well.

During the burial, everything connected with the funeral has to go into the ground, everything that, for example, has touched the casket. Also, people put certain objects and sometimes some tobacco into the casket. After the burial, the family gives a feast of wild rice, moose meat, bannock... A little bit of everything that is eaten at the feast is put away and burned. This is food for the spirit of the person who has died. The food gives the spirit strength for his journey."<sup>22</sup>

Whether or not death occurs from natural causes makes little difference in the manner of burial. However, the cause of death is exceedingly important in terms of the subsequent experience of the spirit. Like the Indians of Mexico, the Grassy Narrows people believe that the soul of a man who dies from violence, particularly if the person dies young, has great difficulty in leaving the physical world. His soul lingers on earth; it wanders restless and disturbed. Not being at peace, it makes itself heard and felt to the living members of the family, and begs for assistance in its struggle to depart from the territory of its previous physical life and the place of its violent death. The family, in such cases, continues the practice of certain special rites until the soul ceases to make its presence known. This pattern is especially characteristic for a young person who dies violently at the peak of his mental, spiritual, and physical capabilities.



In the light of the extraordinary and high incidence of violent death on the new reserve, it is not surprising that this belief is supported and constantly reinforced by events which transcend the boundaries of social life objectively defined. Among other such cases, the recurring appearance of the spirit of David Fobister, a supremely gifted young man who died violently of shotgun wounds in November of 1976, is widely known. In the year following his death, several persons in his immediate family, and a non-Indian person, claim to have seen him; the recognition was strong enough to be followed by a series of special ceremonies on his behalf. Irrespective of our own prejudices on this subject, it is evident that this belief still remains an integral part of the psychological field of the people at Grassy Narrows and affects their behaviour. It is also clear that the living can continue to be emotionally affected and disturbed by the anticipation of difficulties to be encountered by the soul of the deceased, especially if the death was caused by an act of violence.

It is sad that of all the customs and rituals of the old reserve, of all the beliefs and practices that molded an individual's perception of Self and his relationship to society, only the rituals of death have survived the relocation.

## Chapter 6.

### TRANSFORMATION IN COMMUNITY LIFE AND POLITICAL ORDER

In the preceding pages, the focus of observation of the old reserve way of life centered on the Ojibwa family and its importance in structuring the relationship of the individual to his society. Generation after generation, the family assigned the rights and obligations for each of its members; the family transmitted the values of life and guided social interaction; and, from the family, a man derived his status and identity in the community. The Ojibwa family was the "warp" of the social fabric, "part social hybrid, part residential community, part formal organization", a total institution that formed the permanent framework of Ojibwa society.<sup>1</sup>

The central importance of the family in the social order of the old reserve did not mean the absence of "community" or the spirit of "communality". The Grassy Narrows community, however, was not bound by notions of year-round residence in a specific village. On the contrary, the "community" was the ebb and flow of families over a territory without exact geographical limits, the movement between winter trapping grounds and summer residence on the old reserve, the alternation between the times of gathering and the times of dispersal, between the old reserve and new locations during periods of berry-picking and wild rice gathering. This movement gave community life its ever changing form and character, while other linkages and ties gave "community" its meaning.

#### The Nature of the Community

Based on the Treaty concluded with the Government of Canada in 1873, the people of Grassy Narrows recognized not only their common

---

<sup>1</sup> Robert Redfield, The Little Community (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960). The chapter on social structure stresses the importance of lineage family groups in primitive society.

membership in the Band, but also their belonging to a definite place called Grassy Narrows. Especially those who were brought up on the old reserve felt a part of it; they recognized that other members of the Band were also parts of it, belonged to it, shared a common history, lived by the same values, sentiments, and beliefs, and participated in the same struggle for physical survival. And in spite of the centripetal tendencies of family life, people knew that they were closely related through inter-marriage, and that there were wider linkages of blood that permeated the Band as a whole.<sup>2</sup> Their distinctiveness as a "little community" was not only apparent to outside observers; it was also expressed in the group-consciousness of the people of Grassy Narrows who were, and are, aware of their separateness, as a Band and as a territory, from all other Bands, territories, and communities.<sup>3</sup>

The Grassy Narrows community of the old reserve was a very loosely-knit social unit, and the way of life of the Indian people was without many of the recognized forms of community life that occur in our own society. There were no social classes, for example, named or identified by the people. There existed no voluntary associations, no societies of any specialized nature, no social institutions that demanded a high degree of cooperation. Even in their religious life, individual families undertook ceremonies according to their own schedules, rather than according to a standardized tribal or community calendar. Until the advent of the Medewiwin society in the Ojibwa nation as a whole, there

---

2

In a very detailed study of genealogies of Grassy Narrows families, from the signing of Treaty in 1873 to the present-day, Melva Zook found that practically every member of the Grassy Narrows Band was related to everyone else at the second cousin level. Melva Zook is a Mennonite missionary who lived at Grassy Narrows for 14 years and kept very impressive records of births, marriages, and deaths in the community.

3

Robert Redfield defines a "little community" by four qualities: distinctiveness: where the community begins and where it ends is apparent; smallness: it can be a unit of observation; homogeneity: activities and states of mind of people of the same age and sex are similar; and, self-sufficiency: the community provides for all or most of the activities and needs of the people in it. Grassy Narrows fits this definition of community. Redfield, Little Community, p. 4.

was no standing body of religious leadership.<sup>4</sup> In religious life, as well as in civil matters, the Ojibwa maintained a high degree of personal autonomy. The community engaged in little economic cooperation. There were only a few occasions in the course of the year where social gatherings encompassed all, or nearly all, of the people. In both economic and social life, the families of Grassy Narrows maintained their independence, and let this feature of their community life be engraved into the spatial form of the old reserve.<sup>5</sup> It is, of course, not coincidental that many other Ojibwa reserves exhibited a similar pattern of settlement before the Government decided to promote year-round, permanent, and highly concentrated Indian reserve communities.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> The Medewiwin movement apparently had its origins in the late eighteenth century. This movement involved the formation of associations of specialized spiritual leaders. In its fullest form, in the late nineteenth century, it included elaborate initiations, a hierarchical priesthood, training and fees for members, and regular ceremonies and meetings. The Medewiwin ceremonies were performed on the old reserve, and are remembered by many people at Grassy Narrows. However, these ceremonies were of an extra-community character, with people coming to them from other reserves in northwestern Ontario.

A detailed discussion of the Medewiwin Society can be found in C. Vecsey, Traditional Ojibwa Religion and Its Historical Changes, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, June 1977, pp. 202-226.

<sup>5</sup> A discussion of the spatial form of the old reserve is contained in Chapter 4, pp. 99-103.

<sup>6</sup> A study of the Round Lake people confirmed that the settlement pattern of the Ojibwa before the advent of year-round residence in one village or reserve was typified by small neighbourhood sub-communities based entirely on the origin of the families and their kinship ties. Only in the summer did people gather more closely together "to form a type of village life, and for the most part...the summer settlements for each sub-community were separate...It cannot be over-emphasized that concentrated village life is new to the Round Lake people and much evidence is on hand that they still feel more comfortable when the nearest neighbours who are not close kin are located some miles distant." Ontario, Department of Lands and Forests, The Round Lake Ojibwa, The People, The Land, The Resources 1968-1970, Unpublished paper prepared for A.R.D.A., Project 25075, December 1971, p. 242 and 244.

The old reserve pattern of gathering and dispersal, of coming together as a whole community and drawing apart as individual family groups, was determined by the seasonal cycle and mode of livelihood of the people. The occasions of gathering combined work and enjoyment and often harmonized multiple purposes in one activity. Treaty Day, for example, was perhaps the most important community affair in the course of the year. As described by Maggie Land, its ceremonial and symbolic features, the gun salute, pow-wow, and payment of treaty, represented the most important fact of history for the Indian people in their relationship with the people of Canada.<sup>7</sup> Combined with evident political and historic meaning, Treaty Day was also a festive time, a time of songs and dances. It followed a period of a more relaxed dispersal of families for the spring trapping of muskrat and beaver, and it signalled the beginning of commercial fishing and guiding in the the tourist camps. For the women, it was a time for planting gardens and for settling into a less demanding environment of work than that of the winter trapline.

Around berry-picking time in August, the Grassy Narrows families left the reserve and gathered in a particular spot "where the berries were good"; there they set up their tents and stayed for a week or two to gather berries. This was also a time when the rewards of work were balanced by the pleasures of sociability and merriment. After berry-picking, people returned to the old reserve and stayed there until the late autumn provided another opportunity for gathering on the shores of the wild rice fields. The harvesting of wild rice was begun with a religious ceremony and a thanksgiving feast. The people burned food for the manitos and cooked moose meat and wild rice for themselves. Social and religious goals were harmonized with economic purpose in the rituals surrounding the harvest of wild rice.

---

7

Treaty Day is described by Maggie Land, p. 93.

Finally in mid-winter, after the period of fall and early winter trapping, most of the trapping families returned to the old reserve. They brought with them their yield of fur for sale to the Hudson's Bay Company, and they gathered to celebrate Christmas and to have a feast.<sup>8</sup> After this mid-winter break, the families dispersed again, went back to the traplines, and did not return to the old reserve until spring. The ebb and flow of community life then began anew.

In this kind of community, with each family looking after its own members and providing for its own subsistence, there was no need for central institutions or for complex associations. The very nature of the "community" was perfectly suited to the entire way of life. Kinship ties and the bonds of family were stronger affective ties than the ties to the "Band". Therefore the most effective means of social control rested with, and were exercised by, the kinship network. In the relationship among the Grassy Narrows families, there is some evidence that sorcery and magic played an important part in maintaining "social order". The other community-wide institution, the Chief and Band Council, had only limited powers and circumscribed authority to control the actions of community members. The absence of prescribed rules and regulations, the non-existence of any "machinery of government", and the relative isolation of the Grassy Narrows people, made necessary indigenous forms of social control. We will now discuss these forms of social control and the powers, organization, and function of the Chief and Band Council.

---

8

The Christmas feast was apparently organized by the Hudson's Bay Company manager. Missionary priests also tried to be on the old reserve at Christmas time in order to say Mass. Of all the Christian traditions, Christmas seems to have been the most important celebration for the Grassy Narrows people. The Christmas feast has become a community tradition to this day.

### Indigenous Forms of Social Control

The subject of sorcery and magic has caught the imagination of many anthropologists studying Canadian Indian reserve communities. As a result, it has been accorded extensive treatment in the literature. Western-trained social scientists have long been fascinated by accounts of illness and death that resulted from the use of mysterious and supernatural forces. In their writings, they have recorded cases of sorcerers harming their victims by means of small seemingly insignificant objects that travelled many miles, like ballistic missiles, and penetrated the victim's body causing illness or death.<sup>9</sup> They have also written about death-inducing rituals upon an image or effigy of the intended victim,<sup>10</sup> about the loss of soul during shaking tent ceremonies,<sup>11</sup> and about bear-metamorphosis and change of form on the part of the sorcerer with intent to cause misfortune.<sup>12</sup> The level of detail in these descriptions is remarkable; on my part, I found the Grassy Narrows people extremely

---

9

The theory behind this form of sorcery was that material objects (sharp needles, stones, sticks, bones, gunshells, and so on) could be magically projected into the body of the victim, and strike in exactly the most vulnerable spot to cause certain illness or even death. The victim could only be saved by a medicine man who would remove these objects by sucking them out. Maggie Land, on page 95 of this paper, describes this sucking procedure in relation to illness, although she is not specific about the cause of the illness.

10

Diamond Jenness, for example, lists nine different ways in which sorcerers used to kill or injure their enemies. Their methods included sketching their victim's image on the ground and placing poison on the spot to be harmed; or, tying a carved wooden image of the victim to a tree with a thread, and waiting for the thread to break for that would be the moment of the victim's death. Many of these methods seem to have been based on visualization techniques and the effecting of death through the magical separation of the soul from the body. Jenness, Ojibwa Indians of Parry Island, pp. 85-86.

11

Maggie Land describes the shaking tent ceremony in the story of her life, page 95. She was a witness several times to this ritual and has confirmed the ability of a medicine man to "call the soul" of a person to the tent. I have never heard anyone at Grassy Narrows speak of the use of the shaking tent ceremony to cause harm or misfortune to others; the people say it was used for curing, for communication, or for other problem-solving types of situations. This does not invalidate the inherent potential of the medicine man to cause the permanent separation of the soul from the body, which would lead to death.

12

The subject of shamanism in the form of bear-metamorphosis has recently been treated in a novel. Lynne Sallot and Tom Peltier, Bearwalk (Don Mills, Ontario: Musson Book Company, 1977).

reluctant to discuss any situation involving the use of "power" or magic for purposes of causing misfortune.<sup>13</sup> They will only admit that indeed "this happened" on the old reserve between feuding families. Thus, much of the information on the extent of sorcery as a means of settling inter-family quarrels comes from outside observers or long-time residents on the old reserve. Father Lacelle:

"These Indian ceremonies, and sure they had them at Grassy Narrows, the people would play with power that had something to do with the very foundation of religion. Some aspects of Indian spiritual life were very good, for example, the use of herbs for healing; but, other sides of the Indian religion had nothing to do with the medicine. We found that some 'medicine-men' would usurp the power and say that 'with my power, I can do you harm, I can make you sick.' We felt that with that kind of power, they were in opposition to Christianity, that the use of that power was wrong.

Now at Grassy Narrows, people lived as clan groups, and every major group had their own medicine man or healer. In the Band as a whole, there might also be one who was more powerful than the rest, and maybe he would be a Chief or a Councillor. Some of these clans, they might have used their medicine men against each other. That has been said. People have told me that. I know that there is something there and to them, it is real. I don't think we [the Missionaries] ever came close to breaking that down. They don't let you witness these things, and they don't talk about them too much either."<sup>14</sup>

The Mennonite Missionaries, who came to the old reserve in 1958, also confirm that they personally know of several cases of mysterious death

---

13

In contrast to my own difficulty in obtaining information on the use of "power" or "bad medicine" to settle quarrels among families or to take revenge for some act of perceived aggression, Edward Rogers devotes almost an entire chapter in his book on the Round Lake Ojibwa to the use of supernatural "power" in interpersonal relations and inter-family feuding. He did his field work in 1958 and 1959 and was able to gather numerous case studies and concrete examples. Rogers, Round Lake Ojibwa, pp. D3-D31.

14

Father Lacelle, April 3, 1979.



and illness on the old reserve "that was caused by bad medicine".<sup>15</sup>

Other long-term observers, like Stu Martin, believe that "bad medicine" also must have been practiced by the Grassy Narrows families if it were practiced in communities with which the Grassy Narrows people had a close and historic association:

"In my view, there was a much closer connection between the Grassy Narrows people and the people northward, than between Grassy people and people along the English-Wabigoon river, like the Whitedog people. For instance, you notice that many old women at Grassy, like Maggie Land, and Shepa, and Lillian Strong wear these tams. This comes from Pekangikum, and there the women also wear tams. You will also notice a preference for bright colours among the Grassy women. I noticed this in Pekangikum as well...

The northern connection is simple to explain. Many Grassy Narrows families had their traplines north of Red Lake, and many had their traplines next to the Pekangikum people's traplines. They inter-married; the Grassy people say they are 'friends' with the Pekangikum people.

Now I was at Pekangikum for 11 years; I started with them 25 years ago. The Pekangikum people practiced Indian medicine. They had shaking tent ceremonies. Many were very good people, especially James Mezakeyach who was a medicine man and who still used to go out in the bush alone and fast for six days when he needed something, some special power. Now he used his power for healing, but there were others who used the same power to hurt others. This 'bad medicine' it was all over the place, and it must have been at Grassy too. The worst place for the abuse of Indian medicine, insofar as the Indian people say, was Whitedog. And it continues to this day."<sup>16</sup>

John Beaver of Grassy Narrows once speculated that perhaps the terrible violence and sickness of the new reserve was "a punishment, sent

---

<sup>15</sup>

One of the Mennonite missionaries, Melva Zook, was a nurse by training. She was a witness to a number of deaths, including children, that the community explained were caused by "a curse sent by someone". A healthy dose of skepticism notwithstanding, she also could not explain such deaths in any other way.

<sup>16</sup>

Interview with Stu Martin, March 8, 1980 in Kenora, Ontario.

by the Great Spirit, because of the curses used by certain families on the old reserve."<sup>17</sup>

The relevance of certain observations on the practice of sorcery on the old reserve lies not in the intrinsic fascination with this dimension of culture, but in the use of sorcery as a means of social control. In a community without formal regulations for social conduct, without courts, judges, or police, the respect or fear of supernatural "power" played a crucial role in the maintenance of social order and in the conduct of relations among family groups. For example, in a subsistence society where there was an ever-present possibility of starvation, a man had the supreme obligation to share with the members of his kinship group. If he did not, his behaviour had to be punished because it violated a cardinal ethical principle and endangered the survival of the group. Under these conditions, no man could interfere with the livelihood of others, by stealing others' equipment or by otherwise impeding the pursuit of game.<sup>18</sup> The Ojibwa seldom engaged in open expressions of anger or face-to-face aggression; instead, they retaliated by covert means, namely, by the use of sorcery and magic to punish those who transgressed social norms.<sup>19</sup> Aside from justifiable provocations of the use of sorcery, however, Indian people attributed the cause of many

---

<sup>17</sup>

In general, people like John Beaver have great difficulty in explaining the sharp deterioration in social and community life on the new reserve. Traditionally, misfortune such as sickness (epidemic) that befell an entire Band was never interpreted as caused by impersonal forces; rather, it was a punishment for offending the Great Spirit by not living in the proper way. Although to some extent "bad medicine" was part of the "norm" of social relations in traditional Indian communities, perhaps John Beaver is here implying that on the old reserve, the practice went beyond "the norm" and therefore was a factor in bringing about the present troubles.

<sup>18</sup>

In some respects, the severity of punishment in the Ojibwa society for interfering with a man's livelihood reminds me of the unwritten code of social conduct in concentration camps: a man could kill the one who stole his piece of bread.

<sup>19</sup>

An extensive description of the characteristic channels for the expression of aggression in Ojibwa society is to be found in A. Irving Hallowell, Culture and Experience, Chapters 13, 14, and 15. Hallowell writes that "this absence of overt aggression in face-to-face situations is an outstanding feature of interpersonal relations in Saulteaux society.

human vicissitudes to a "curse sent by someone", whether or not their misfortune was produced by a curse or by chance or accident. For them, impersonal forces were never the real causes of events; somebody had to be responsible. Over time, the expectations that sorcery was probably involved in the inevitable hazards of life, like illness, misadventure, or death, led to feuds among the Grassy Narrows families. From all accounts, these feuds were an ever-present characteristic of the way of life on the old reserve. Indeed, the fear and suspicion of covert malevolence from other clan groups continues to operate to this day.<sup>20</sup> Even on the new reserve, the possibility of sorcery is real because people continue to act as if it were so; thus, older attitudes towards the nature of the phenomenal world are still constituents of thought, feeling, and social behaviour. A contemporary illustration speaks eloquently to this point. The speaker is Hiro Miyamatsu, a Japanese photo-journalist, who lived at Grassy Narrows from October, 1975 to the end of 1979:

"One day, someone brought into the Grassy Narrows reserve an old Medewiwin scroll. It had been found by a commercial fisherman in a crack along the cliffs of the English-Wabigoon river. The scroll found its way into my hands.

---

The culturally sanctioned channels for hostility are of two kinds. The first is typified by...unformalized ways and means [like gossip]...the second channel is sorcery and magic. [By the latter means, the Indian could] vent anger with greater effectiveness than would be possible by verbal insult or even a physical assault, short of murder. [One could] make a person suffer a lingering illness, interfere with his economically productive activities and thus menace his living...make his children sick, or lure the wife away by love magic...or kill." pp. 280-281.

In this context, it is evident that "the ways of knowing" about the nature of "power", its acquisition, and its deployment were basic to social relations, and constituted a necessity for the spiritual elder of each major family group.

20

"In the last analysis", writes Hallowell, "almost everyone still believes that it is possible for another person to harm him by covert means...sorcery can emanate not only from individuals of other clan groups, but from one's own relatives...It is reasonable to assert that the major factor which was at the root of the latent suspicion and distrust that colored interpersonal relations of the Indians of earlier periods still operates today...This is the psychological explanation of the 'atomism' or individualism of Ojibwa society."

Hallowell, Culture and Experience, p. 147.

It was made of birch bark which I forced open. It was about eight feet long, composed of about nine individual pieces held together by carefully crafted leather bindings. Inside were pictographs, etched into the bark, very well preserved. This scroll would have belonged to an individual of significant spiritual power, a man of some standing in the community.

Uncertain of what to do with it, I took it to the Chief, Simon Fobister, who was visiting the house of Arnold Pelly. As I entered the house with the scroll in my hand, Simon immediately started up, began shouting at me, and rushed outside. At the same time, Arnold Pelly jumped up, ran into the bedroom, and from there shouted in Ojibway to take the thing back where it belonged. I was very surprised at the obvious panic. Tommy Keesick was also in the house at the time. He wanted to see the scroll. He wanted to touch it.

Later in the afternoon when I returned home, I received an astonishing message. Tommy Keesick, a young man of 35 years, had had a stroke. I rushed to his place. Tommy was lying on a sofa, one leg completely paralyzed and the pupils of his eyes dilated. Somehow, we managed to get him into my van and we rushed down the Jones Road to Kenora. An ambulance, previously arranged by telephone, met us half-way.

When I returned to the reserve, people were eyeing me with great suspicion. They thought that I had deliberately exposed Tommy to the power of bad medicine. They believed that the scroll should not have been brought into the reserve, that it was the personal property of a medicine man, and that therefore it could cause harm to those who were exposed to it.

I decided to let the strong reaction simmer for a few days. Fortunately Tommy recovered and came back to the reserve the next day. I realized the power of the beliefs, and the fear that still exists among the people.... Outsiders are also suspect; once the trust of the people is lost, it takes an extraordinary effort to recover it."<sup>21</sup>

---

21

Hiro's story is partially taken from his own narrative of it, and partially from the notations in my own diary on the day in March, 1980 that the incident occurred.

The purpose of this example is to underline the continuing power of beliefs in sorcery, and the fear and anxiety surrounding any artifacts that might have belonged to the user of supernatural "power". Whether or not Tommy's stroke was real and caused by the exposure to the scroll is not the issue; Tommy believed it was real and derived from the scroll; members of his entire family also believed that this was so. Indeed, one has to wonder at the probabilities extant for the people of Grassy Narrows to achieve a high degree of mutual cooperation and trust when their outlook continues to be coloured by the expectations of covert malevolence from other clan groups whose artifacts are still in existence. Such attitudes have a definite bearing on the political structure and relationships within the reserve, and to this subject we now turn our attention.

### Political Organization and Leadership

The community of the old reserve of Grassy Narrows, which consisted of about a dozen clan groups and a total population of not more than 200 persons, was nominally governed by a Chief and his Council. From the time of Treaty in 1873, when the people were formally recognized as a "Band", to 1933 the position of Chief was hereditary and passed along the male line of descent:

"Long ago, Chiefs were elected for a very long time, a life-time... Sah-katch-eway signed Treaty No. 3, and then his son succeeded him and was Chief for many, many years. After he died [Pierrot] that's when things began to change. Our Chiefs stopped being hereditary, even though that's the way it's supposed to be. After Pierrot, the Government told us we had to elect Chiefs for a term of three years."<sup>22</sup>

Certain qualifications were required of the Chief. Most important of these was that he had to set a good example in all areas. He had to be a good hunter and trapper because in times of scarcity, he had to ensure survival of those in need from his own resources. He had to have a superior religious power and he had to adhere most faithfully to the norms of behaviour considered proper in all spheres of life. He was, not coincidentally, from a large and powerful clan group. All the qualities which determined his recruitment, his character, connections, and ability, also helped maintain his incumbency, for there existed no formal sanctions by means of which he kept his position.

The position of Chief entailed certain obligations and responsibilities, but as the powers of Chief were limited, the duties were not onerous. He was expected to receive delegations from other communities and to deal with the Indian Agent over the security of treaty rights; he was to ensure, to the best of his ability, security from want for those in need; and, he was to settle inter-family disputes, particularly over hunting and trapping territories and rights to resource use.

In their frequent references to political life on the old reserve, the Grassy Narrows people invariably emphasize that several important responsibilities of the Chief have somehow been "lost" after the relocation to the new reserve. They specifically refer to the Chief's responsibility to ensure equal access to life-supporting resources on the part of all band members, and his duty to keep in close contact with his people and to help them with their problems. These and other aspects of political leadership are best communicated by the people themselves:

"As long as we were still on the old reserve, the organization of the Chief and Band Council was not imposed from the outside like it is today.

The way in which the Chief and Council worked on the old reserve was different than now...The Chief was like the head of all the Councillors. Each Councillor had specific duties. One Councillor was like a policeman; he had to keep the peace, to investigate complaints. Still, we didn't have as much trouble on the old reserve as we do now with people who do bad things. We never had house-burnings, for example, although sometimes people did steal and if the problem was something the Chief couldn't handle, the Indian people would have to wait until Treaty Day for the RCMP to help solve the problem.

The Chief also appointed a Councillor who looked after the distribution of nets, ammunition, and other things issued by the Indian Agent. He may also have had the job of distributing meat to people. People used to hunt by families, and meat was never wasted. It was dried, smoked, or made into a powder and added to stew or soup. Sometimes meat from a big hunt would be shared, not just within the family, but with other families. It was the job of the Councillor to help distribute the meat.

Whenever someone was sick, or couldn't provide his family with food, the Chief would appoint one of his Councillors to go around all the families and collect food - tea, snuff, sugar, lard, meat and flour. Everyone had to make a contribution. That's how people helped each other, because we didn't have welfare on the old reserve, and only very old people got rations from the government. The Chief, it was his job to make sure that people had enough. And the community then had two horses to haul wood for those who needed help. No one paid the drivers to help! Today, this has changed. If you don't have \$30 for wood, and you can't get welfare, you're stuck...People just don't take care of each other, like they used to....

The Chief and Council, they were much closer to their people when we lived on the old reserve than they are today.

The Chief was supposed to be a man who set a good example in all things, in trapping, in family life...He encouraged every family to have a garden; he got the tools and the seeds from the Indian Agent, and then organized maybe a dozen men with picks and hoes to go around to each family and help make a garden. There's no help like that today. The Chief also made sure that people were trapping. If they didn't go, he would talk to them, find out why...

And on the old reserve, the Chief appointed a kind of 'spokesman', someone who had the right and the responsibility to talk to the children about the 'Indian way of life'. He was an old man, like a teacher. And there were other people who were like advisers to him, who helped him make decisions.

The Chief and Council never made important decisions alone. They had a meeting. They called everybody to come to the community hall on the old reserve. Now, the Chief and Council have a meeting and it's private. They lock themselves up in a room and make decisions for everybody else. That's not the way it used to be. That's not the way it should be.

One of the things I really miss is that on the old reserve, the Chief and Council went around house to house. On the old reserve, we were scattered; they had to come far to visit me, but they came. Do you know that since I moved here [to the new reserve] the Chief never came to my house? Now they have cars, yet they do not stop to talk to their people. All the Chiefs today, they spend too much time 'talking to the outsiders'; they spend too much time dealing with the white society. They are now government people, just like the white people."<sup>23</sup>

The themes of "being closer to the people", of more open decision-making, of the division of labour within the Council, of the obligations

---

23

This lengthy passage is composed of excerpts from a number of interviews: John Beaver, March 10, 1979; Maryann Keewatin, March 11, 1979; Charlie Fobister, March 9, 1979; and, John Kokopenace, March 7, 1979. These interviews were translated by Pat Loon.

In addition, information on the role and function of the Chief and Band Council was obtained from Eugene Keewatin, March 6, 1979; Katherine Swain, March 8, 1979, and Andy Keewatin, January 4, 1979.



to ensure a certain minimum of welfare and to encourage economic self-sufficiency — these themes surface again and again in conversations. People will say the same thing in several different ways, as if to pound into the consciousness of the "outsider" some modicum of understanding that their political life used to be quite different on the old reserve from that which exists today. Phrases like "imposed from the outside", "just like government people", "spend too much time with the white society" betray the people's perception of the most important direction along which the change in the nature and functioning of their institution of Chief and Band Council occurred. They feel that the Chief and Council now serve the interests of the white society, principally the agencies of Government, and no longer satisfy the traditional cultural criteria of good political leadership. The relocation is blamed for the change because it "broke the isolation barrier and made us vulnerable to ever-increasing government interference in our affairs."<sup>24</sup> Yet, similar changes in the political life of Indian reserve communities occurred elsewhere as a result of public policies of assimilation.<sup>25</sup> In the case of Grassy Narrows, relocation was the physical event that symbolized and manifested the direction and nature of government policy in action.

---

<sup>24</sup> Chief Simon Fobister January 7, 1979.

<sup>25</sup> The change in the functioning of the Chief and Band Council as a result of government policy happened on other Indian reserves as well. Inasmuch as the Grassy Narrows people were most closely associated with the Pekangikum people, it may be worth noting that, until very recently, the Pekangikum Chief and Band Council were similarly structured and also relatively free from government interference in internal affairs. Stu Martin, who worked with the Department of Indian Affairs for a quarter of a century, describes the situation:

"Not so long ago, at Pekangikum, the Chief and Council functioned quite differently; they were organized in their own way, and this had nothing to do with us [the Department]. Every person on that Council had a different responsibility. For example, the Band had its own policing system. They had a policeman, and during the year, they used to 'pay him' with groceries. He would get money only on treaty day. The people would simply take care of him, and he, in turn, would do the policing job. There was no need for lots of government people on the reserves. I would go to Pekangikum only four times a year. The Chief and Council took care of their own community, and made sure that people made a decent living."

Stu Martin, Interview in Kenora, March 8, 1980.

Leaving aside for the moment the question of the extent of government intervention in the affairs of the Grassy Narrows Band,<sup>26</sup> it is appropriate to outline the three main dimensions of the impact of the relocation on the political life of the community. First, there has been a definite change in the character of the institution of Chief and Council, in the roles and responsibilities, qualifications, tenure, and authority of the political leadership. Second, certain indigenous sanctions on social behaviour and forms of self-help, once internal to the community, have now been replaced by a system of paternalistic controls and administered social assistance, external to the community. Third, the relocation set in motion the conditions for the emergence of a class society. Social stratification developed as a function of unequal access to resources controlled by government and administered for the government by the Chief and Council. The much increased dependence on government-sponsored livelihood by once independent and self-sufficient family groups has sharpened and made more intense latent and historic inter-family tensions, as families have to compete to create "fiefdoms" of power and influence exclusive to members of their own kinship group.

Some of the changes in the character of the institution of the Chief and Council have already been mentioned: the orientation outwards to the white society in contrast with more inward, community-centered, concerns; the infrequency of house-to-house visits by the Chief and Council and the observable lack of communication and contact with people, in contrast to earlier times; the perceived secrecy of decision-making and the complexity of administration, as opposed to simpler issues and more open, democratic, processes of consultation and consensus; the feeling that the structure of the institution of the Chief and Council has been imposed "from the outside". Indeed, in contrast to regulations which now state that there has to be a Councillor elected for every

---

26

This subject is covered in greater detail in Chapter 8, Livelihood: Changes in the Mode of Production, pp. 245-258.

100 persons in the Band, the old reserve Council was a more informal unit. It was a council of advisors to the Chief, and each Councillor was chosen on the basis of competence, skill, kinship relations, and natural ability for the specific duties and responsibilities assigned to him. The Chief exercised his authority through this council of advisors, because he had no means of enforcing his wishes unless the leading men in the Band endorsed them and the remainder were content to acquiesce. The degree of authority that the Chief had was itself a matter of his personal character and ability rather than of ascribed status. If he were a superior human being to begin with, as he had to be under the traditional leadership criteria, then he would have had little difficulty in exercising authority over the Band. That these criteria of leadership and norms with respect to authority continued to prevail on the old reserve up to the time of the relocation is evident from the list of Chiefs of Grassy Narrows from the time of Treaty to the present day.<sup>27</sup>

The year 1962 seems to be a watershed in the history of political leadership of the Grassy Narrows Band. Until that year, all the Chiefs had been men who epitomised the "ideal" person. They were many-sided persons, combining religious, economic, and kinship roles in their political leadership function. Beginning with 1962, the role of Chief began to be purely political in nature. The new Chiefs were all younger men, distinguished not by their skill in hunting, religious powers, or kinship affiliation, but rather by their ability to speak English and relate to the Department of Indian Affairs.<sup>28</sup> On the new reserve, not only

---

27

A list of Chiefs was provided by Mrs. Campbell, Human Resources Records Section, Public Records Division, Public Archives of Canada. In reviewing this list of Chiefs with the people of Grassy Narrows, it became apparent that many Chiefs were also quite prominent medicine men, as well as heads of important clans. All were reputed to be good hunters. In the early 1950's, there was less emphasis placed on the religious aspect of leadership, although Andy Keewatin, for example, had been exposed to the Medewiwin society.

28

In 1962, the Department of Indian Affairs was particularly anxious that the Grassy Narrows people elect a Chief that the government could deal with. The people had been resisting the move to the new reserve, and government-built houses were lying vacant on the new site for over a year. Finally, Robert Kejick was elected Chief and he presided over the implementation of the relocation in 1963-64. It is interesting to note that Robert Kejick subsequently became the only Grassy Narrows Band member ever to be granted a permanent civil service job within the Department of Indian Affairs.

did the Chiefs not exhibit the traits of character and the linked roles that had previously strengthened their position as leader, but they also lost the sanctions which maintained their position. In the transformation of the role of Chief to suit the responsibilities specified or required by Government, the present Chiefs have minimal authority and command little respect among Grassy Narrows people. Their one recognized source of political power rests in their relationship to Government, because gradually they have become the dispensers of the "rewards" of the system: jobs, housing, and other programs whose funding has steadily increased since the 1960's. With the advent of fundamental structural changes in the community economy, and a sense of privatization in the goods and services to be secured through the funnel of the Chief and Council, indigenous forms of self-help, sharing, and communal efforts to care for the sick and the needy have in effect disappeared. Similarly, indigenous forms of social control, particularly through the Chief and Council, have also been replaced with paternalistic controls by governmental social agencies.

Earlier in this paper, a number of references had been made to the role of the Chief and Council on the old reserve with respect to maintaining social order, mediating disputes among families, and settling intra-family quarrels. Maryann Keewatin, for example, described an incident in her own life where the Chief and Council intervened to solve her problems with her husband.<sup>29</sup> Maggie Land, in the story of her life, explained how very strict the Chief and Council used to be regarding family discipline, and how the Indian Agent reinforced social codes by refusing to pay treaty to illegitimate children of uncertain parentage.<sup>30</sup> In the following passage, Art Assin summarizes the kind of control exercised by the Chief and his Councillors on the old reserve:

---

<sup>29</sup> Maryann Keewatin, quoted on page 134.

<sup>30</sup> Maggie Land, quoted on page 93.

"On the old reserve when the families were still together, most of the time the families could solve their own problems. They didn't need too much help with this, because every family had its own 'spiritual leader', and he could take care of both physical and mental problems. He had the knowledge to work through many difficulties. Although we never had 'family problems' like we do on the new reserve, still our Chief and Councillors made sure that these family quarrels didn't become too serious. If a wife went with another man, for example, the Chief would put some pressure on the woman to go back to her husband. If a girl had a baby, the Chief wanted to know who the father was because otherwise, the child could not be registered as treaty. If certain families would quarrel, the Chief would try to talk to the people so that the quarrel did not get out of hand. If the Chief couldn't settle something, then on Treaty Day when the Indian Agent came with the RCMP, the Chief and Council would discuss with the Indian Agent what they couldn't settle by themselves. Of course, on the old reserve, the Indian Agent came only once or twice a year, not like nowadays.

What I am trying to say is that when we lived on the old reserve, our people had their own way of solving their 'social problems', if that's what you call them. They had their own procedures. On the new reserve, these procedures don't matter anymore. The Chief and Council no longer can help the social situation. You know why? Because we are a broken people. When everything changes so fast, we can't even help ourselves."<sup>31</sup>

On the new reserve, the Chief and Councillors lack the authority, lack the necessary personal qualities and moral stature, to control social behaviour and enforce community standards. The Grassy Narrows families now deeply resent any interference on the part of the Chief in their lives and he can no longer mediate in inter-family disputes. Under rapidly changing social conditions, the once widely-held codes of social behaviour have given way to conflicting norms and expectations. If the Chief acts in one way, there will always be those who adhere to opposite

---

<sup>31</sup>

Art Assin, interviewed on March 26 and 27, 1979. Pat Loon translated.

norms and who will condemn him for his action. The attempt to balance discordant attitudes or beliefs as to what constitutes good social conduct generates what Chief Simon Fobister has described as "cruel pressure". The Chief becomes a symbol and a scapegoat for the people's own discontent, insecurity, and alienation. The result has been an almost complete giving in to paternalistic controls superimposed on the band population by non-Indian persons and enforced by the laws of the mainstream society. The Grassy Narrows people have abandoned their traditions of sharing and mutual help and have become much more self-centered on their own problems. Most have surrendered to the very institutions that maintain their dependency.<sup>32</sup> The new reserve, the old people say, is a much poorer place in spirit than the old reserve ever was. The context is indeed more painful in the absence of a communal authority strong enough to re-establish once unquestionable norms.

Predictably, the "white man's system" of helping people solve their social problems doesn't work for Indian people:

"You white people, you divide everything up. If we Indians have a family problem, we now have to go to ten different government agencies: one for getting a job, one for getting welfare, one for the care of children, one for health, and so on. And no place exists to help the family as a whole.

---

32

The dependency on social agencies is manifest in various ways. At Grassy Narrows, if a child has been abandoned by the parents during a drinking spree, for example, neighbours will generally not take the child into their home. Instead, people will call the Children's Aid Society or the police to "solve the problem". People who are not closely related will also not feed anybody else's children, even if it is known that the parents have been on a long binge. The children then scavenge in garbage cans or break into the school to steal food. Again, usually "outsiders" are called in to provide relief. Such modes of social behaviour would have been inconceivable on the old reserve where social norms of mutual aid and established patterns of sharing, supervised by the Chief and Council, still prevailed.

On the new reserve, we are supposed to use your laws to protect ourselves, but you can see for yourself that your laws don't work for us. We can't use your laws to stop the fighting between husbands and wives. We're not in that situation yet where we can sue each other in court. So, we are caught in the middle. We can't work out our problems ourselves, because our families are broken up, and the Chief and Council don't work like they used to. We can't depend on your social agencies and your laws to help us either. We are caught in the middle, like I said before. For you, for the white society, we Indians are the problem.

And all this, what I am telling you about, this happened in the last twenty years. In my generation."<sup>33</sup>

The changes in the functioning of the institution of Chief and Council since the move to the new reserve have touched all aspects of the society and culture of Grassy Narrows. As Government began pouring money into the reserves to "bring them up to the standards of the white society", wage jobs and welfare began to be administered at the Band office by people who had been trained as Band administrators. The much more egalitarian society of the old reserve, based as it was on the family group as the unit of production and consumption and on equality of access to land and its resources, shifted in a matter of a few years to a society of "classes". A hierarchy of status, power, and influence developed to administer the financial and employment benefits of government programs. Belonging to the "new class", however, was definitely not related to traditional hunting or trapping skills or to customary social relationships. Spiritual knowledge meant nothing, and once powerful clans could no longer compete on the basis of traditionally recognized achievements. Rather, the "good jobs at the Band office" and the "good wage jobs" became spoils to be fought over by those who could speak English and who had had some schooling. The quite rapid shift in the social and political structure of the community of the new reserve created a situation of tremendous tension, a glimmer of which is represented in the following passage:

"The real trouble between families started when they moved us to the new reserve.

On this reserve, we still have very strong clan ties and loyalties to our own family, but the real hard feelings among our people are more recent, I would say in the last 15 years. This is because now our people are all mixed up and they live much too close together. But another reason is that the jobs on the new reserve are limited. The good jobs are for people with better education, that can speak your language.

The old families of Grassy Narrows, the original families, they are left out of these good jobs because they are still more 'Indian', more traditional...the Kokopenaces, the Taypaywaykejicks, the Loons, the Necanapenaces...how many of these families have the good jobs in the band office? None of them. They are on welfare. Sure, they drink a lot. But they are also very resentful of the changes at Grassy...there is a lot of resentment against the people in the Band office.

Before we moved to this reserve, our people were much more equal. Everybody made their living like everybody else."<sup>34</sup>

Under a situation of competition for scarce resources, namely jobs which are steady, year-round, and offer a good wage, the Grassy Narrows people have developed their own system of social stratification. There are the "old families of Grassy Narrows", and the "outsiders". The "outsiders" are not only white people living on the reserve, although the term is frequently applied to them as well, but also Indian people who do not really "belong" to the original families, who have become Band members through marriage, who have only one parent originating from Grassy Narrows, or who "fall among the cracks" of the clan system. The greatest resentment is reserved for those Indian "outsiders" who are perceived to have taken away the good wage jobs from the "original" Grassy Narrows families:



On the old reserve, everybody was more equal. Everybody had to work hard to make a living on the land: trapping, fishing, hunting, guiding, you name it. And people were more independent; they had to make their own living, take care of themselves.

Now take a look at the Band office. Even those who do not belong here get wages for doing nothing. Many of those who make money off this reserve are not even Grassy Narrows people; they come from other reserves or they're not even treaty...Larry Cochrane, Leonard Joseph...they're not from here; just because they married girls from here doesn't make them from Grassy. And these outsiders get all the good jobs.

And there are too many white people on this reserve. As far as I'm concerned, that's a broken treaty promise. Reserves are supposed to be only for Indians. On the old reserve, we were left alone. Now we are run by white people who don't belong here, and by other Indian people who don't belong here either. We are also run by young kids who don't know anything, who can't trap, who don't know our Indian ways, but who are running the Band office! I may be an old man, but I don't like what's happened since we moved here."<sup>35</sup>

Not all "outsiders" of Indian blood are fortunate members of the "new class". Most are members of the new underclass of the "occasionally employed and on welfare". These people constitute the lowest strata of the new society of the new reserve, for they cannot depend on their clan strength to exert political pressure on the allocation of houses, jobs, or special favours from the Band office. Not coincidentally, many of these people are extremely heavy drinkers, because they also feel trapped in their own society:

"Even though my mother was from Grassy, I am treated as an outsider. The Chief tells me to go find a job outside the reserve. I've always been treated this way, and it hurts. Grassy people have become very selfish.

---

<sup>35</sup> Steve Loon, March 12, 1979.

The big division in this reserve is between people with steady jobs, like the people in the Band office who don't do anything anyway, and everybody else who is trying to make a living...But those people in the band office, they don't care about us, they only care about themselves, their pay-checks, and their own relatives. They don't care about nothing.

So, some people have a lot of money, and others, like myself, have nothing. Right now, I am trying to commercial fish. But it's hard. In the winter, I go to cut pulp, but here too, the prices per cord are too low to support a family. But there's nothing else for people like me and my family. I'm thirty years old and I have children to feed. So I eat fish, because there's nothing else to live on..."<sup>36</sup>

This situation of inherent inequality which arises from a shift to wage labour from traditional land-based occupations is a breeding ground for nepotism and patronage. The old system of social sanctions through sorcery and magic no longer is operative, not just because the norms dictating what would be considered an act of aggression (for example, trespass on another's hunting ground) do not apply to the new economic conditions, but also because almost all the people with knowledge of this "power" have died. Fear of retaliation for some transgression, however, and the expectation that others have malevolent intentions, are qualities still deeply embedded into the collective consciousness of the Grassy Narrows people. Thus, the constant competition for favoured economic positions for members of one's own kin group occurs silently in the absence of overt face-to-face confrontation, but still within the context of a residue of fear left over from the practices of sorcery in a not-too-distant past. The old norms constraining trespass on a hunting ground have been translated to new norms constricting trespass on a family's established "sphere of influence" or economic "territory". A specific example of the new "fiefdoms" characterizing inter-family relationships under the changed political order of the new reserve will bring the point home:

"When the Band first started the school lunch program, we needed someone dependable. Because Maryann Keewatin was the only non-drinking woman on the reserve at that time, she was offered the job of providing hot lunches for approximately sixty students a day. She hired two women to help, both from her own clan, and although getting reliable helpers to come steadily has been a constant problem, Maryann continued to hire only from her own clan. She refused to consider all others and until she retired, the lunch project was literally run by Maryann Keewatin and her family. Her seven children and [almost three dozen] grandchildren provided a labour pool...I was in charge of the budget and my head would spin trying to keep track of who worked what hours...Yet, the lunch program was an important source of steady income and employment, so it was understood that it 'belonged to' Maryann's family."<sup>37</sup>

The establishment of a certain degree of control over opportunities for productive employment is not confined to on-reserve projects, although these are most amenable to influence. The Band administration, for example, is for all practical purposes in the hands of one family.<sup>38</sup> Most janitorial work on the reserve, which is highly desirable because of its regularity and steady income, is done by another family. All construction is supervised by Andy Keewatin and he ensures that members of his family have jobs. The Fobister family is protected from anxiety over employment, because Bill Fobister is the Coordinator of Band Work Programs. Those families who have established themselves in a position of controlling economic influence are often well represented in the political body of the Band Council.

---

37

Hiro Miyamatsu, January 16, 1979.

38

In November 1976, when I first came to Grassy Narrows, the Band administration was run by Sharon Fobister, daughter of Maggie Land. The Band Administrator position is one which allows the exercise of considerable power in the allocation of government-provided resources among family groups.

The "spheres of influence" on the part of individual families extend beyond the boundaries of the reserve. In the summertime, guiding provides steady and high-income employment. At Grassy Lodge, Tom Payash is the senior guide who recommends other guides to the owner. When Ball Lake was in operation, Andy Keewatin was favoured as the top guide. At Delaney Lodge, the majority of guiding and cabin jobs go to Maryann Keewatin's family. Each family jealously guards its contacts with the white society, on and off the reserve, because in the grasp for some kind of security, a favoured relationship with white people, especially with bureaucrats controlling program funds, is the most important channel for socio-economic mobility and membership in the "new class".

All these changes in the political and social order of the Grassy Narrows community are the products of a public policy whose main thrust has always been, and continues to be, the administration and control of Indian people for the purposes of assimilation. This is why other Indian communities have undergone very similar transformations. Without the relocation of the reserve, without the opening up of easy access for governmental personnel, these changes might have come more slowly with perhaps less devastating an impact on the spirit of community. Moreover, the rate of change at Grassy Narrows was accelerated by the massive infusion of government funds following the discovery of mercury in 1970 and the ban on commercial fishing. Nevertheless, it can be said that the relocation set the stage for the onslaught on traditional ways of being, believing, and living.

In concluding this section on changes in the political and social order following the relocation, we will present some compelling evidence of the pitiless disorganizing pressures of the new reserve environment. This evidence takes the form of a comparison, before and after the move to the new reserve, of the stability of tenure of the political leadership of the Grassy Narrows Band. The following list tells the story:

List of Chiefs: Grassy Narrows Band<sup>39</sup>

1873 - 1962  
(89 years)

Sah-katch-way  
Charles Pierrot  
Amos Ross Lesi (Swain)  
Charlie Iassens (Hyacinthe)  
Alexander Pope (Fobister)  
Edward Hyacinthe  
John Loon  
Andrew Keewatin  
Pierre Taypaywaykejick

1962 - 1976  
(14 years)

Robert Kejick  
Andrew Keewatin  
Matthew Beaver  
Bill Fobister  
Art Pahpahsay  
Pierre Taypaywaykejick  
Art Assin  
David Beaver  
Tommy Kejick  
Joe Quoquat  
Simon Fobister

Under the "cruel pressure" of events following the relocation, the political leadership of the Band collapsed. Elected Chiefs hardly lasted for more than a year, sometimes less, because very few could cope with such rapid social and economic change. Accustomed to electing a Chief for a long period of time on the old reserve, the people witnessed an extraordinary turnover of Chiefs in the decade following the relocation. For almost ninety years, they had been governed by only nine leaders,<sup>40</sup> In the fourteen years after relocation, however, they saw eleven Chiefs attempt to govern; many had to resign because they could not cope with the stress of the job. Simon Fobister, who was only 19 years old when he became Chief in 1976, proved to be of stronger mettle. He was Chief for three years and guided the community through perhaps its darkest period. Still, he was not immune to the harsh criticism by the people for his inability to speak the Ojibwa language fluently, and he could not overcome the inter-family feuding over the allocation of favoured positions in the hierarchy of influence and power. Because he was also considered an "outsider" to the powerful clan structure of the reserve, ultimately

---

<sup>39</sup>

Documentation received from Public Records Division, Public Archives of Canada.

<sup>40</sup>

One of the Chiefs of this period had an exceptionally brief tenure. Amos Ross Lesi (Joe Swain) was Chief for less than a year. Sah-katcheway and his son, Pierrot, governed together for over half a century, to 1933 when three-year terms were imposed by government. Many Chiefs, however, were simply re-elected.

he fell victim to the competition between the Kejick and Fobister families for political leadership.<sup>41</sup>

On the basis of the material presented so far, one has to conclude that the basic elements of political and social life on the old reserve did not survive the transplantation to the new site and the collision with mainstream culture. The ebb and flow of community life, the pattern of gathering and dispersal, the economic self-sufficiency and territorial distinctiveness of kinship groups, the social sanctions, and the nature and function of political leadership - - all these elements no longer exist in the same form. The Grassy Narrows experience is, of course, not unique. In a study of Indian communities in British Columbia in the early 1950's, social scientists came to the conclusion that:

"...no customary actions, elements of belief or attitude, knowledge or techniques, have been transmitted from earlier generations to the present without major alteration. In other cases, the social inheritance has undergone radical alteration, even inversion."<sup>42</sup>

Other scholars, observing the absence of a minimal level of social interaction and internal sanctions within present-day Indian communities go so far as to challenge the relevance of the concept of "community" to contemporary Indian reserves. The strongest such statement comes from R.W. Dunning who studied the Pine Tree Ojibwa:

"...for the Pine Tree Ojibwa, governmental recognition and control is the essential basis of community for the people, rather than any internal organization or indigenous expression of ethnic unity. If this is valid then the collectivity of

---

<sup>41</sup>

In April, 1980, Simon Fobister was succeeded by Tommy Kejick as Chief. Tommy Kejick is a younger member of a large and historically important clan group, the Taypaywaykejicks. His grandmother, Shepa Taypaywaykejick, is the last surviving medicine woman on the reserve.

<sup>42</sup>

H.B. Hawthorn et al., The Indians of British Columbia (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), p. 39.

persons recognized by Government as Indians in Pine Tree is an artificial one. These persons who appear to have lost the essence of their traditional culture and who themselves would have been lost in the larger population but for government protection, might be termed Indian Status Persons rather than Indians.

The Indian Status Person is the person who lives and depends on government grants in various forms to support his marginal subsistence level of living. Occasional wage labour increases his income, but the solid, one might almost say overwhelming basis for security appears to be not the group of inter-related families sharing a common history, culture, and residence, but the land itself with the implication of a paternal government in the form of the agent who will not see him starve on land."<sup>43</sup>

Data from Grassy Narrows support this icy appraisal and desolate view of the nature of "community" in the contemporary setting. The change has come much later at Grassy Narrows than in other Indian reserves in the country, and has been much more concentrated in time. Andy Keewatin:

"It seems to me like two centuries have passed, and yet I know that we were moved only twenty years ago. For the older people, it has meant living in two worlds...they have seen in ten years, what most people won't see in a hundred..."<sup>44</sup>

Documentation with respect to the rate of change, the nature and timing of contact between the Grassy Narrows people and the "outside world", is presented in the next chapter.

---

43

R.W. Dunning, "Some Problems of Reserve Indian Communities: A Case Study," Anthropologica 6 (1964), p. 35-36.

44

Andy Keewatin, January 7, 1979.

Chapter 7.

RELATIONS WITH THE OUTSIDE SOCIETY

From the material presented so far on the way of life on the old reserve, it would seem that for the better part of the century after Treaty, the environment of the Grassy Narrows people required little in the way of personal or social change. Old habits, beliefs, and traditions seemed adequate for coping with the simple realities of everyday life, and thus key institutions could remain largely intact. No community, however primitive or isolated, can be entirely free of influences from other communities and institutions outside of it. Our portrait of Grassy Narrows people therefore cannot be finished without the introduction of a historical perspective on what happened to them at the hands of the white society.

The relationship between Grassy Narrows and the broader society can be best described with reference to three distinct historical periods. The first period stretches from the time of Treaty to the end of the Second World War (1873-1945). It is characterized by the primacy of the Hudson's Bay Company and the missions in Indian life, and minimal state interference in community affairs. The second period, from the end of the war to the time of the relocation (1945-1963), is marked by the beginning of provincial government involvement in land and resource use regulations, the extension to Indians of certain services already available to other citizens, and the increasing off-reserve movement of people into private-sector occasional wage labour. The third period begins with the relocation to the new reserve and encompasses present-day Indian-white relationships. It is characterized by massive federal government intervention in Band affairs, a sharp decline in the traditional mode of production, a surge in Indian alcoholism and other indicators of social pathology, and an intensification of racism in the town of Kenora directed against Indian people. The relocation of Grassy Narrows is the opportunity for implementing all the other changes that were to occur as a matter of government policy with respect to native people, changes intimately associated with the establishment of permanent year-round settlement and a more "modern" social and economic order.



From Treaty to the End of World War II: 1873-1945

From the time of Treaty to the end of the Second World War, the Indians of northwestern Ontario were peripheral to the interests of Government and the white society. Even as resource development and white settlement expanded in the first quarter of the twentieth century in the area of the Lake of the Woods, the Ojibwa Indians did not participate in the booming economy of the new frontier.<sup>1</sup> They continued to live on or near their reserve lands and trapping territories and their traditional mode of production, based on hunting, trapping, and gathering, remained largely unthreatened. Their economic activities were not endangered as yet by significant competition from white people for resources, or by government regulations over land and resource use. The state as a whole, represented by the Governments of Ontario and Canada, played a marginal role in the daily lives of Indian people.

In contrast to the state apparatus, the Christian missions and the Hudson's Bay Company were institutions of paramount importance in the life of the Grassy Narrows people in the first half of the twentieth century. In the geographically isolated regions of the north, The Bay found a captive market in the Indian people for its goods, and established

---

1

These developments on the frontier included the building of a second transcontinental railway (the CNR line) in 1909, midway between the Grassy Narrows reserve and the CPR railway line further south which passed through Kenora. In the decade of the 1920's, the lumbering industry was given a boost with the construction of a pulp mill in Kenora. Later in the same decade, a gold rush started around Red Lake, a town about 125 miles north of Grassy Narrows. Minaki Lodge, catering to wealthy tourists with a preference for magnificent scenery and superb sports fishing, opened in 1916 near the rail crossing of the Winnipeg river. In the early 1930's, the Trans-Canada Highway was built through the town of Kenora, thus facilitating much better access to the region from points both east and west.

Indian people remained largely uninvolved in these resource and transport developments. Their contact with the economy of the frontier was limited to producing commodities for exchange, principally fur, wild rice and berries. The last two commodities became more important trade items in the decade of the 1940's. Occasional wage jobs were found on railway section gangs and in sawmilling, although the Grassy Narrows people did not take advantage of these jobs until the late 1940's.

a monopoly in the trade of furs. In many small settlements clustered around Bay trading posts, the "Hudson's Bay Company played god with the Indian people."<sup>2</sup> The Bay's tenacious hold over Indian trappers, their state of permanent indebtedness to the Company, has been well documented in the literature and no further comment on the exploitative nature of that relationship needs to be made. At Grassy Narrows, however, the people do not speak ill of the Company managers who lived with them on the Bay island on the old reserve since 1911. They offer no specific examples of unfair trade practices (for example, involving the use of alcohol) or of unethical management. Instead, they speak of the time "when the Bay still took care of the trappers and made a feast for them around Christmas...and when the only wage jobs available were to haul freight for the CNR or goods and supplies for the Bay, from the Jones Road to the old reserve."<sup>3</sup> People remember that the Bay extended credit for air transportation to those trappers whose traplines were a considerable distance from the old reserve, that the Bay managers always

---

2

The expression belongs to Stu Martin who emphasized the Bay's monopoly position and the resulting dependency and exploitation relationship between Indian people and the Company in the north. Stu Martin, March 8, 1980, in Kenora.

Historically speaking, not only did the Bay keep the trappers in a state of permanent indebtedness, but the system of credit remains unchanged to this day. The system worked in the following way: at the beginning of the trapping season, the Bay manager extended credit to the trappers for tools, gear, and basic foodstuffs, namely, flour, lard, sugar, salt, tea, raisins, and canned milk. The trappers paid for these items with furs brought in during the Christmas break; they then received additional credit for more goods to take back to the trapline. Cash as such was rarely used as a medium of exchange. Later, as welfare and other social assistance measures supplemented trapping incomes, the people continued to buy on credit from the Bay, handing over their entire government cheque to the Bay manager as soon as it was received. This transaction was made easier by the fact that the Bay manager also ran the post office.

3

John Beaver, December 12, 1977.

Norman Schantz, the Mennonite missionary who arrived at Grassy Narrows in 1958, seems to agree with the unconventional view that the Hudson's Bay Company, as it operated on the old reserve since 1911, was not an entirely exploitative, greedy, and manipulative business. He recalls that:

"The Bay managers...were usually single men who came from Scotland because they couldn't find work in their own country. They stayed for a period of about two years. Initially they worked for the Bay to pay off the cost of the trip to Canada. I would say that generally they were sympathetic and good to the Grassy Narrows people, but I don't know about any other reserves." Norman Schantz, in conversation, date unrecorded.

provided rations in times of need or emergency, and that the Bay was the only source of essential foodstuffs and implements. Whatever the record of the Company-Indian relationship in other parts of the north, it must be said that in the minds of the Grassy Narrows people, the Hudson's Bay Company does not touch the raw nerve of historical memory as acutely as the recall of the other controlling force in Indian life, the Christian missions.

Historical accounts of early contact with Indian people are replete with evidence that government representatives and missionaries regarded the Indians as savages. They leave little doubt that the core message transmitted to the indigenous people in the course of their colonization was that their own culture was inferior, even barbaric, and that they should be adopting the more civilized ways of the white society. Christianity was to replace the ideology of the primitive man, just as the missionaries were to serve as the agents of change. The entire process of "civilization" was to be spearheaded by mission-run schools. The attitude of the Government of Canada, which was to prevail for almost three-quarters of a century after Treaty, is well summed up in the following excerpt from the annual report of John McIntyre, Indian Agent for reserves in Ontario. He is speaking of the establishment of schools, run by missionaries, for Indian children:

"By methods of this nature...the Indian would be gradually and permanently advanced to the scale of civil society; his migratory habits, and fondness for roaming, would be cured, and an interesting class of our fellowmen rescued from degradation....

The aim of all these institutes [mission-run schools] is to train the Indian to give up his old ways, and to settle among his white brethren on equal terms and with equal advantage."<sup>4</sup>

---

4

Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Annual Reports. Report of John McIntyre to the Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs in Ottawa, 1885, pp. 166-167.

The Government relegated social and educational responsibilities to the missions because no "decent white teachers" could be expected to live under the primitive conditions of Indian life:

"It is evident...that efficient teachers cannot be induced to isolate themselves from congenial society and other comforts of civilized life to undertake to teach schools among savages in remote localities...."<sup>5</sup>

The ideology of colonization, of a linear advance "up the scale of civil society", and the alliance of convenience between the government and the Christian missions continued until the early 1950's. In north-western Ontario, the Oblate Fathers, with financial assistance from the Government of Canada, opened the first large residential school in the area at McIntosh in 1924.<sup>6</sup> Young people from Grassy Narrows were boarded there along with Indian children from other northern Ontario reserves. Some Grassy Narrows people also attended St. Mary's Catholic residential school in Kenora, while others were sent to Presbyterian Cecilia Jeffreys, located on the outskirts of the town. These residential schools became synonymous with Indian education in northwestern Ontario until the late 1950's and early 1960's when the federal government finally moved to secularize Indian education and bring it under the direct control of the Department of Indian Affairs. For a very long time, however, residential schools were seen as civilizing influences on the young generation of Indians, allowing the young to be "educated" in the values of the dominant society, while the adults continued to live "in the Indian way".

The residential schools paid little homage to education. Instead, the missionaries emphasized the virtues of the farming culture, the

---

<sup>5</sup>

Report of E. McColl to the Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs in Ottawa, DIAND, Annual Reports, 1885, p. 127.

<sup>6</sup>

There was also a very small school started on the old reserve of Grassy Narrows in 1923-24, but it functioned only after fall trapping for a 2-3 week period. Most of the Grassy Narrows children went to McIntosh residential school.

discipline of manual labour, the strict adherence to regular hours, religious instruction, and the exclusive use of the English language. In the following passages, Andy Keewatin, now 61 years of age, and Marcel Pahpasay, 47 years old, describe a day's work in school. Although more than a decade had passed before Marcel followed Andy into the McIntosh classrooms, the curriculum had obviously changed little over time:

"In my generation, there was not too much resistance to the residential school. We had it in our heads, but you couldn't say it out loud. We went along with it. The boys had to get up at 5:00 in the morning to clean the barn before breakfast. At 6:00 a.m. we had to be at Mass, and then we had to milk the cows. Sometimes during the day, we would have classes in English and arithmetic, but all I remember was the hard work, the chores...I don't know how we found time to play, because there was always work to do."<sup>7</sup>

I went to grade two at McIntosh. There was only a couple of hours of class in the morning: one hour of catechism, one hour of English and arithmetic. At 10:00 o'clock, I had to go for the mail and returned about noon. Then, in the afternoon, I had to split wood until 3:00 p.m. Then I had to mend socks and do other chores like that. We had to take care of the horses, and the cows, and the garden. I was 14 years old when I left school, and I know how to read and write just a little bit."<sup>8</sup>

Aside from funding mission-run schools, the Department of Indian Affairs (DIAND) apparently paid little heed to the content of their curriculum. It maintained a superficial and infrequent supervisory presence in the form of an Inspector, paid by DIAND. One of the most revealing statements about the attitude of the federal government to

---

<sup>7</sup> Andy Keewatin, February 5, 1980

<sup>8</sup> Marcel Pahpasay, November 14, 1979

Indian education comes from Father Lacelle, who served as Administrator of the McIntosh school:

"I remember one time, the Inspector was in to inspect the school. We had grade nine. I asked him if he was going to visit grade nine. He says no. He says that as a separate school in Ontario, we shouldn't have grade nine. Then he says that he isn't being paid for visiting grade nine, and then, to my great surprise, he added, 'If we let them, the Indian people, go to grade nine, then they'll want to go to grade ten, and then they'll want to go to university. That's what we don't want.'

He said that right in front of me, and I told him that I was a witness to what he had said. But then he replied that, 'If you try to do anything different, the higher-ups, they will shut you up. I have a family. I have to do what they say.'

What I'm trying to tell you is that there was a lot of pressure on people who worked with Indians not to 'rock the boat'. The Department of Indian Affairs really didn't care about Indian education. We were getting the same grant for an 18-year old teenager, as for a 6-year old kid. This was still true in the 1950's. They also didn't care what was being taught, although in my time, we tried to upgrade the curriculum. The attitude of the Indian Agents was very poor, and things started changing only in the late 1950's. In 1949, however, McIntosh was changed to a full day school, and in 1965, with the fire in the residences, it was closed down for good."<sup>9</sup>

Although the residential school system was supposed to lead to the abandonment of traditional Ojibwa ways, and although every effort was made to denigrate Indian values and repress the Ojibwa language, the residential schools did not affect each generation of the Grassy Narrows people equally. The first three generations of students at McIntosh, represented by people like Maggie Land, Andy Keewatin, and Marcel Pahpasay, did not experience the crushing blows to individual identity that were felt by succeeding and younger generations. The earlier generations returning to the old reserve from residential schools could continue to live in the Indian way because the mode of production was still intact. The social institutions were also still functioning and thus the retention of Indianness was not a problem. Furthermore, the

elders of each family group made a special effort to "re-educate" the young people in the values of the Indian society and in the skills required to make a living from the land. The strongest adverse impact of the residential schools on Indian culture and individual identity was felt by that generation that was caught in the transition from the old to the new way of life, the generation that had neither the integrity of the old traditions and institutions nor the security of the new ways to help guide it through life's stages. People like Simon Fobister, who represents the last group of the Grassy Narrows people who were educated in residential schools, feel especially bitter about the cultural deprivation sanctioned by these institutions:

"The Catholics had these big schools where the nuns and priests got paid by government. They took us away from our home life, they showed us their religion and they brain-washed us in the values of capitalism and the industrial society. This was their definition of education. They forbid us to speak the Ojibwa language. They wanted assimilation. They weren't patient. We were immobilized. It was like a concentration camp.

Then the definition of education was changed, and they put the children into schools on the reserves. But that meant that the parents had to stay on the reserve to take care of the children. There was no choice. You couldn't just leave for the trapline all winter. Everybody was trapped by this educational system. But the goal was still assimilation....that goal was never changed."<sup>10</sup>

The heritage of hostility to the Christian churches, and the residue of raw burning anger at the memory of the residential school experience, remains the property of the younger generation of the Grassy Narrows people. The older people did not suffer so deeply the deprivation of their language, the denigration of their values, and the undermining of their identity by the residential schools. Rather, their experience of the erosion of culture is most often expressed in examples of the gradual, but relentless, pressures from the state to limit their freedom to use the land and its resources in traditional ways. This last thought brings us to the discussion of the second period in the relations of the Grassy Narrows people with the outside world.

From the End of the War to Relocation: 1945-1963

Intervention by the Government of Ontario in Indian life increased dramatically after the war. The provincial government, with its constitutionally enshrined rights over provincial land and resources, began to take a much more active role in the management of fur, fish, and game. The old Department of Game and Fisheries became part of the Department of Lands and Forests in 1946, and a new philosophy of "conservation and management" quickly took hold of its operations. Operating procedures included new regulations over resource access, better record-keeping on resource use, regular reviews of licences, and strategies for the "scientific" management of renewable resources.<sup>11</sup>

The changes affected Indian people in many ways. In the first place, the government put in place a system of registered traplines in 1947. Indians in northwestern Ontario received priority in the allocation of traplines on the basis of historic use; however, they could lose their traplines if they did not meet annual harvest quotas set for certain species, particularly beaver. They also became subject to compulsory reporting procedures on the fur catch imposed on all trapline holders. Although these requirements were less strictly enforced for Treaty Indian trappers than for white trappers, Indian people nevertheless perceived them as intrusions on their treaty rights. Furthermore, the trapline registration served to fragment large tracts of territory held by the extended family into smaller individual units, making rotation of trapping areas more difficult, and imposing a sense of privatization, of individual responsibility, over areas once communally managed. The philosophy underlying provincial intervention in trapping was also at odds with the Indians' point of view. For the government, the trapline was simply a convenient territorial unit, and trapping basically a commercial activity. Through sound "management principles", the fur could be "exploited" to yield a maximum return that was consistent with resource conservation goals as well. Access to the fur resource, by

---

11

A possible factor in the development of the new policies was the manifestation of over-trapping in some areas of northern Ontario, as white trappers, pushed into trapping by the hardships of the Great Depression in the 1920's, entered into the fur trade.



Indians or by any other citizen of the province, was a privilege, not a right, which could be revoked at any time. In contrast, the Indian people viewed the trapline as a place to live, to raise children and teach skills, to obtain food, and to harvest furs to exchange for other commodities. Trapping was not just a commercial activity but a way of life; "trapping was the culture", as Art Assin would say. Access to fur-bearing animals was a fundamental right guaranteed by Treaty. This divergence of views, as illustrated by reference to trapping, also underlies more contemporary struggles between Indian people and the Ontario government over access to, and use of, natural resources.

The second area of Indian economic activity affected by the post-war concern for resource management on the part of the provincial government was commercial fishing.<sup>12</sup> Licences for commercial fishing had apparently been required since the turn of the century, but the province did not yet have in place an efficient system for controlling the fishery. In 1947-48, the government imposed strict reporting requirements on the fish catch and tightened up the system of licences for specific lakes. These regulations did not have the same impact on the Grassy Narrows people as those affecting trapping, because at Grassy Narrows commercial fishing began much later than at other Lake of the Woods reserves and was more closely associated with the opening up of tourist camps for sports fishing. The people started to fish for commerce only when air transportation made it possible to send the fish to the market in Kenora expeditiously and reliably.<sup>13</sup> In 1957, the Onta government issued a licence to the Grassy Narrows Band covering "the public waters of Indian Lake, Grassy Narrows Lake, and the waters lying between these lakes and adjacent to the Reserve."<sup>14</sup>

---

12

Fishing for domestic consumption is a right guaranteed by Treaty. The Grassy Narrows people used to dry fish for the winter but did not use it for trade. They could not commercial fish before air transport became available because fish is a perishable commodity and they could not market the catch quickly enough.

13

Ball Lake Lodge opened for sports fishing in 1947. Its owner, Barney Lamm, was involved in air transport and he encouraged the Grassy Narrows people to start commercial fishing.

14

Application from the Grassy Narrows Band to the Department of Lands and Forests, Province of Ontario, July 9, 1957.

Outside of reserve waters, the licence was not valid from April 1st to September 30th, because according to provincial policy, sports fishing was to be given priority over commercial fishing in the Lake of the Woods and English River areas. The logic applied to the management of the fishery was identical to that governing the traplines: the fishery that yielded the highest economic return per dollar invested was the most deserving of government support. Inasmuch as the sports fishery clearly generated more dollars per fish than the commercial fishery, the primacy of the former became well-established in government policy. Although the economy of Grassy Narrows in the post-war period has been more closely linked with the sports fishery in terms of the seasonal employment of guides by the fishing lodges, this policy nevertheless adversely affected other Indian communities more dependent on the commercial fishery.<sup>15</sup>

The third area of Indian economic activity affected by the new wave of provincial resource administration was the gathering of wild rice. Wild rice had always been an important source of food for the

---

<sup>15</sup>

The calculus of 'economic return' from the point of view of the Indian people starts from fundamentally different assumptions. Peter Usher, in examining the effect of provincial policy on Indian communities dependent upon the commercial fishery, makes three observations with respect to the differences between the Indian and the Government point of view: (1) The income from commercial fishing goes directly to the Indian community, whereas the greater part of the income from sports fishing goes to the white entrepreneurs, the owners of the tourist lodges. (2) In contrast to deep sea or large lake commercial fishing, the ideal production unit for the smaller, scattered northern Ontario lakes is small: an individual, a partnership, or a family. The capital equipment must therefore be affordable and operable by a small group. In this respect, commercial fishing in northwestern Ontario does not place any new requirements on the traditional Indian mode of production, which is organized at the household level. (3) For many Indian communities, the commercial fishery, like the trapline, is more than just a commercial activity. It is a family enterprise, a means of socializing the children, a source of food, and a means for commodity exchange. The disruption of the commercial fishery is therefore an assault not only on the mode of production, but also on the social relations of production.

Peter Usher et al., "The Economic and Social Impact of Mercury Pollution on Whitedog and Grassy Narrows Indian Reserves, Ontario", Unpublished Report for the Whitedog and Grassy Narrows Band, (1979), p. 94, 101 & 139.

Ojibwa of northwestern Ontario and therefore it had a special place in the people's ceremonial and spiritual life. The rice fields ripen at different times, depending on water levels, weather, and location. At Grassy Narrows, it was customary for the elders of the Band to go into the fields first, to see if the crop was ready for picking. Once the signal for a mature crop was given, the people assembled near the wild rice fields for a thanksgiving feast, and the harvest began. After the picking was over, the families returned to the old reserve to begin processing the green rice by drying, threshing, and roasting it. According to Maggie Land, most families stored their finished rice for the winter; in the early 1940's, however, the processed rice began to be sold, in small quantities, to non-native buyers. In the early 1950's, buyers began purchasing green rice directly from the pickers and sending it to processing plants in Manitoba and Minnesota. As the interest of the white entrepreneurs in wild rice expanded, as the rice grew in importance as a cash crop, the provincial government introduced a system of land use permits or "wild rice licence areas". The Grassy Narrows Band received a certain block of land reserved for the exclusive use of Band members; other tracts, containing actual or potential wild rice fields, were to be accessible to non-native harvesters. This provincial intervention in regulating access to a resource considered by Indian people to be "theirs" by custom and by right, continues to be perceived as one more link in the chain that has slowly strangled their freedom to live on and from the land. Recent developments contesting Indians' exclusive access to the wild rice resource even in the licenced areas have intensified feelings of anger and frustration against the relentless encroachment by the white society on Indian land and traditional resources.<sup>16</sup>

---

16

The value of green wild rice has quadrupled in the last four years. The enormous and quick money to be made by picking wild rice with mechanical harvesters, rather than by canoe and stick as is the Indian method, has attracted the interest of white entrepreneurs. They organized to put pressure on the Government of Ontario to open up access to the wild rice fields. The Government prepared policy changes which would have effectively removed wild rice from Indian control. In 1978, however, the Royal Commission on the Northern Environment recommended that a moratorium of five years be placed on the opening of access to traditional Indian wild rice areas. This moratorium is now in effect, but the Indian people have reason to be uncertain about the prospects that the issue of access will be resolved in their favour.

The post-war period that began with the registration of traplines and increasing provincial involvement in regulating access to off-reserve resources also saw a major expansion of social welfare programs in Canada. Since these were based on universality of application, Indian people became eligible to receive regular monthly payments under the Family Allowance Act, passed in 1944.<sup>17</sup> In 1951, Indians 70 years of age and older began to receive Old Age Security Pensions.<sup>18</sup> Other benefits, administered by the provinces and formerly available only to non-native citizens, also began to flow to Indian people. These categorical payments marked the transition from the "rations" of flour, tea, or lard, delivered to widows and old people at Grassy Narrows at the discretion of the Indian Agent operating through the Hudson's Bay Company, to regular transfer payments by cheque. For the Grassy Narrows people, who still were largely outside the cash economy, these payments began to constitute an important source of income. Yet, they were not of a scale to substitute for, or otherwise displace, the pursuits of hunting, trapping, and gathering. The corrosive effect of expanded government subsidies and social assistance measures on the traditional mode of production was to be felt in the decade of the 1960's, after the community had been relocated to the new reserve.

At the national level, other winds of change were blowing in the post-war period that were to alter the context of Indian policy in Canada. Perhaps as a token of recognition of the contribution of Indian people to the war effort, in 1947-48 a Special Joint Committee of the Senate and House of Commons was appointed to re-examine the Indian Act.

---

17

The Grassy Narrows people started to receive family allowance payments in 1946, consisting of \$8.00 per school-aged child per month. Indians were told that in order to receive these payments, they had to send their children to school. If they did not, the Family Allowance Act Amendment could be invoked to suspend their allowance payments.

18

According to the Annual Reports of the Indian Affairs Branch for 1951 (the Branch was then under the Department of Citizenship and Immigration), Indians aged 65-69 also became eligible to participate in the provincially-administered Old Age Assistance Act, and blind persons could receive benefits under the Blind Persons Act of January 1, 1952 administered by each province. By the mid-1960's, Indian people in Ontario were eligible to receive welfare and other social assistance services comparable to those reaching the non-Indian population.

The Act defines the relationship between Indians and the broader Canadian society.<sup>19</sup> In its deliberations, not only did the Committee hear shocking evidence with respect to the depressed social and economic conditions on Indian reserves, but it produced a series of sweeping recommendations which were to guide the direction of public policy for the next decade. Among many other proposals, the Committee recommended: that Indian integration into the Canadian society be accelerated; that separate schools for Indians be abolished and that Indian education be placed under the direct and sole responsibility of the Indian Affairs Branch; that Indians be included in all "Reconstruction" measures dealing with public health, unemployment, and social security; that Indians be accorded the same rights as other citizens with regard to the consumption of alcohol off the reserve; and, that greater responsibility and more progressive measures of self-government of reserve and Band affairs be granted to Band Councils.<sup>20</sup>

During the 1950's, the federal government gradually proceeded to take over direct responsibility for Indian health and education. Day schools on Indian reserves in northwestern Ontario began to be constructed as early as 1951 (in Whitedog, for example), and the Indian Affairs Branch began to be responsible for the selection and appointment of teachers. The Grassy Narrows people, however, remained isolated and removed from the mainstream of all these developments until the 1960's, when the relocation exposed them to gale winds of change. Band members working outside the old reserve in the post-war period were more immediately affected by a 1956 amendment to the Indian Act which permitted them to purchase and possess liquor.<sup>21</sup> The families who stayed

---

19

For a detailed examination of the evolution of the Indian Act, see The Historical Development of the Indian Act, prepared by the Treaties and Historical Research Centre, Indian and Northern Affairs, August 1978.

20

Journal of the Senate and the House of Commons, volume CVII, 1960-1961.

21

This amendment to the Indian Act made it possible to sell beer and other liquor to the Grassy Narrows guides in the tourist camps, to the men on railway section gangs around McIntosh, and to those who worked in mines in Red Lake. On-reserve alcohol consumption, however, remained prohibited until the late 1970's.

on the old reserve for most of the period between the end of the war and the relocation continued a lifestyle undisturbed by interference from the federal government.<sup>22</sup> In this period, in contrast to the one following, the Department of Indian Affairs confined its relationship with the Grassy Narrows people to annual ceremonial visits on Treaty Day.

The ritualistic and more relaxed observance of Treaty Day on the old reserve is described by the people with nostalgia. People remember personalities because Indian Agents "usually stayed around for a long time."<sup>23</sup> Here is a description of Treaty Day as it used to be:

"Swordman was the last Indian Agent to paddle into the old reserve by canoe. Andy Keewatin, and his stepfather Simon Keewatin, would meet him at Favell, at the train station there, and then they would canoe to the old reserve. They took their time getting there, because they would stop and go fishing all around the lakes in this area. The Indian Agent used to come with the Mounties, all dressed up in uniform, and a doctor. Later, they would come by air.

As soon as they got to the shore where the old treaty hall was, they would be welcomed by volleys of rifle fire in the air. You could hear shots all around the lake. The first night, there was always a pow-wow, a time of drumming and dancing, and a feast. The Grassy Narrows people always had a tent ready for the visitors, so that they could stay for a few days. They did stay, and they talked with the people. Now, of course, they just pay treaty money and leave right away. There are no more ceremonies around Treaty."<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> In 1960, Indian people became enfranchised to vote in federal elections. Apparently the Grassy Narrows people did not exercise this right to vote until after the move to the new reserve.

<sup>23</sup> Pat Loon, March 14, 1979.

"During the time of the relocation, the Indian Agent was a man called Eric Law. Before him was a man called Norman Patterson. And before Patterson, we had Swordman. Swordman was the Indian Agent at the time that Indian Affairs was transferred from the Sioux Lookout Agency to Kenora. We all knew the Indian Agents well because they stayed around for a long time."

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

During his visit, the Indian Agent was supposed to communicate to the people the policy of the Department towards them, ensure that their children were attending school, legally sanction marriages, and help the Chief and Council in the administration of justice.<sup>25</sup>

"The Chief and Council would tell the Indian Agent and the RCMP officer their troubles, everything they couldn't settle by themselves, according to their own procedures. The police and the Agent would then judge these matters. In serious cases, they might tell the people that they have to go to court, but on the old reserve, there were very few crimes like murder...not like on the new reserve."<sup>26</sup>

An important place in the observance of Treaty Day was reserved for the distribution of indispensable tools and rations for the old and the disabled. Old people, like John Kokopenace who heads one of the original Grassy Narrows clans, look back to this aspect of the Indian-government relationship and recall a not-so-distant time when conditions enabled families to provide for their own needs.

"On the old reserve, the Indian Agent used to supply us with all the things that we needed to make a living for ourselves, I mean garden tools and seeds, gill nets for fishing, shotgun shells, and things like that. This was good....

Why did this stop? Every family had the tools, the seeds, and the land for a garden. They could provide for their own potatoes and other vegetables. A lot of families had very good crops, enough to last the winter. They used to build a root house, put straw in it, and keep the vegetables there. People had enough to eat. They didn't need welfare.

---

25

Reference is made to the role of the Indian Agent in helping to maintain social order in chapter 6, pp. 157-158.

26

Pat Loon, March 14, 1979.

Now we can't make a living for ourselves anymore. The new reserve is on dirt and rock. We can't have gardens...the fish is poisoned, there are not as many moose and deer...and our people have to depend on government. This is not good. We used to be a proud and independent people. But everything has changed...in my lifetime."<sup>27</sup>

The contact of the Indian Agent with the people of Grassy Narrows may have been infrequent and limited to the transactions described, but the people remember well the attitude of the Department towards them:

"At that time, Indians were treated like children. Indian Affairs wanted it that way. Indians had no voice at that time."<sup>28</sup>

Although the Indian Act gave the Department of Indian Affairs comprehensive authority to legislate on behalf of Indian people and to administer and control their everyday lives, the Indian Agents seem to have had little interest in "administering" day-to-day existence. According to Father Lacelle, their role in community life, up to the time of the relocation, was marginal:

"The change at Grassy Narrows had been very sudden. There was very little contact between the people there and the government until the government put them in villages. They resisted the move to the new reserve. That was against their grain. They were tribesmen, trappers and hunters gathered in clans. Tribesmen, you know, are very independent.

For years, the Department of Indian Affairs didn't know what was going on with the Indians at Grassy Narrows. We missionaries, we had to name people, keep a record of births, deaths, and marriages. The record-keeping of Indian Agents was very poor. Also, at that time, the Agents couldn't do anything anyway, because all policy came from above, from Ottawa."<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> John Kokopenace, March 7, 1979, translated by Pat Loon.

<sup>28</sup> Pat Loon, March 14, 1979.

<sup>29</sup> Father Lacelle, April 3, 1979.



The lack of access to the old reserve by road, the time and discomfort associated with travel by portage and canoe, and the expense of air transport, served to insulate the Grassy Narrows people from unwanted visitors and even from well-intentioned civil servants. Grassy Narrows was never known as a "hospitable" community. Its isolation alone, however, does not explain the undercurrent of unfriendliness to strangers.<sup>30</sup> Father Lacelle:

"The Grassy Narrows people, they used to tell me that they like to be alone. They didn't like outsiders to get too close, and they most certainly didn't like anyone living on the reserve.

The Oblates had a small log cabin outside the reserve; this suited them fine. They know you're close and handy, but they also know you're not on their reserve.

Indian people are certainly not all the same. Each community, even among the Ojibwa, is different. You can be accepted in one place and rejected in the next one. The Grassy Narrows people, they were always more unfriendly to outsiders.

In my opinion, of all the reserves that I ever visited and knew well, the Grassy Narrows people were closer to being primitive, in the sense of not being exposed to the outside society, than any other group I ever knew. They had related, historically, to the northern Bands rather than to the Lake of the Woods Bands, and they had kept to themselves more. This was certainly true of the group that had never moved outside the old reserve."<sup>31</sup>

---

30

The difference in hospitality between the Cree and the Ojibwa Indians, for example, was noted by early explorers as well as by contemporary scholars. The Cree were noted for their hospitality, and yet both Cree and Ojibwa communities are geographically isolated and both cultures are based on clan groups. Thus, isolation by itself does not explain hostility to strangers. Bill Morison, who has worked with the Ojibwa since the early 1970's, has noted that even within the Ojibwa communities, Grassy Narrows would not be distinguished as a hospitable place. Bill Morison was the forestry adviser to the Band. During the two years that he lived at Grassy Narrows, not once was he offered a cup of tea or a piece of bannock. His experience at Grassy Narrows contradicts norms of hospitality operative on other Ojibwa reserves where he has lived and worked. Perhaps it also reflects the extent to which Grassy Narrows today is a deeply troubled community.

31

Father Lacelle, April 3, 1979.

Even today, the people of Grassy Narrows continue to resent white people and government officials who come into the reserve. Maggie Land insists that "according to Treaty, the reserve was just for Indians." <sup>32</sup> The sentiment of trespass, of violation of rights to domain supposedly protected by Treaty, no doubt has its roots in the extraordinary swiftness with which the protective cushion of isolation was broken down, especially with respect to interference from the state in reserve affairs. Andy Keewatin, Chief and Councillor of Grassy Narrows for almost thirty years, makes the strongest statement about the rate of change:

"You have to remember, that just twenty years ago, our people saw no social workers, no welfare administrators. No police force was stationed on our reserve; no teachers lived on our reserve. The first white doctors started flying in to treat tuberculosis cases only in the 1950's, just before the Mennonites came.

Suddenly, after we moved to this new reserve, we saw government people all the time. They came to tell us how we should build our houses and where we should build them. They came to tell us how we should run our Chief and Council. They told us about 'local government' and they told us we had to have a 'band administration' to take care of the money and the programs that were going to come from the government.

Within a few years of the move to the new reserve, we had social workers taking our children away to foster homes."<sup>33</sup>

This statement eloquently sums up the conclusion to be drawn from the evidence that has been presented, namely, that in the period from the Second World War to the time of the relocation, the limited nature of contact between the Grassy Narrows people and the state, particularly as represented by the Department of Indian Affairs, did not yet serve to undermine the social, economic, or political bases of the old reserve way of life. Aside from the Hudson's Bay manager, the only other "white

---

<sup>32</sup> Maggie Land, quoted on p. 93.

<sup>33</sup> Andy Keewatin, January 5, 1979.

people" in the area of the old reserve were the Mennonite missionaries, who arrived in 1958 at the invitation of Chief Pierre Taypaywaykejick.<sup>34</sup> Their influence on the community was not an overwhelming one. In 1961-62, they began a little school on the Bay island and established themselves in the community by providing nursing services.<sup>35</sup> Amazingly enough, the first nurses from the government's Indian Health Service began regular visits to Grassy Narrows only in the early 1970's after the mercury issue began to receive public attention. Until that time, medical treatment was administered mainly by the Mennonite nurses. A doctor accompanied the Indian Agent only once a year at Treaty time in order to diagnose tuberculosis cases and send them to sanitariums.<sup>36</sup> The first

---

34

In 1953, the head of the Mennonite mission in Red Lake, Irwin Schantz, visited the old reserve settlement and was asked to send a missionary. His brother, Norman Schantz, took up the call and arrived in September 1958. His wife, Dorothy, arrived two weeks later. They were joined a month later by Emma May Nisley, a practical nurse, who stayed for eight months.

35

The first practical nurse at Grassy Narrows was Emma May Nisley. She administered cough syrup, aspirins, medicines for diarrhea and the like, paid for with Mission funds. After her departure, there was no nurse on the old reserve until 1960, when Lillian Yoder arrived. She was also part of the Mission and she stayed for three years. Melva Schrock (later Zook) followed her in 1963 and worked as a nurse for five years. The Mission paid for her stethoscope, bandages, and other supplies and gave her an allowance of \$15.00 per month. The Indian Health Service of the federal government paid for medications and drugs. In 1965, she began to receive a government salary of \$50.00 per month. The first sporadic visits from the Indian Health Service head nurse began after the move to the new reserve. In 1968, the wife of the Hudson's Bay manager, Janet Hull, provided nursing services to the Band. That year, the first "native dispensers" were organized to give out medicines. The first Health Service nurses to come into the reserve for a day or two at a time began their work only in the early 1970's. A small trailer was set up by Medical Services in 1975, and a clinic was built in 1977.

36

Tuberculosis was a cause of many deaths on the old reserve, especially among children. There was initial resistance to the sanitariums because "some people never came back, and the Indians thought the white people were killing them there." Marcel Pahpasay, November 14, 1977.

resident physician, Dr. Peter Newberry, came to Grassy Narrows as a Quaker volunteer only in 1974. Contact between the Grassy Narrows people and the state medical authorities was, to say the least, occasional until the early 1970's.

The absence of government intervention, however, ensured that life on the old reserve was a constant struggle to eke out a subsistence living from the land. Though intimately wrapped up in a body of convictions, customs, and institutions that lent it dignity and meaning, the way of life was not an easy one. Therefore, some people decided to leave the old reserve. They journeyed to places like Dryden, Redditt, Farlane, Red Lake, and McIntosh in search of opportunities for employment. Those who settled around McIntosh wanted to be near their children in the residential school. Their migration did not last very long; it began gaining momentum in the early 1950's and ended in the middle 1960's, when it became known that the government was providing jobs, housing, and welfare as inducements for resettlement on the new reserve. However brief in duration this off-reserve movement was, it was still an important part of the matrix of the community's relations with the outside society in the post-war period.<sup>37</sup> It exposed some Grassy Narrows people to the more negative aspects of life in the small railroad communities of northern Ontario. They returned to their community with ideas, conceptions, and habits that were inimical to the way of life of those who had never left the old reserve. Andy Keewatin explains that this was particularly true of the people who lived around McIntosh:

"At one time, the people of Grassy Narrows were really split up. Those who went to McIntosh lived differently than the people who stayed on the old reserve. For one thing, the McIntosh people got exposed to welfare and cash. There was no welfare on the old reserve; only old people got rations, \$8 dollars a month in groceries. Now welfare

---

37

More detailed information on the pattern of off-reserve movement is provided in the section on "Livelihood", pp. 231-233.

spoils people. At the same time, families at McIntosh, whether they got cash from welfare or from work on the railroad, they learned to drink from the white people. The Grassy Narrows people learned bad things from the white people who worked on the railroads; this wasn't exactly the 'cream' of Canadian society. There was also a lot of violence around McIntosh.

When the Grassy Narrows people came back to the new reserve, they brought with them their way of life in McIntosh. There they got used to being on welfare, and in order to get us to move to the new reserve, the government promised us welfare.

The families on the old reserve, they had continued to live in the traditional way. They still lived an isolated life of hunting and trapping. They were not yet exposed to welfare, or to drinking, or to violence. This is where the bunching up of people on the new reserve, where the putting up of houses too close together and the mixing of clans, became really critical.

You had no sense of being with your own people anymore; you had no sense of being in your own place. [The sense of disorientation], it started right after the move to the new reserve, but all the problems of the drinking and the worst of the violence really came in the 1970's."<sup>38</sup>

In addition to the off-reserve movement of people in search of wage employment, the post-war period was also characterized by another

---

38

Andy Keewatin, January 5, 1979.

Father Lacelle confirmed Andy Keewatin's analysis of the influence on the community of the people who returned from McIntosh. He said:

"It used to be that the people who wanted to quit drinking would leave McIntosh, and come back to the old reserve, because there was no drinking on the old reserve. Sure, home brew was used in ceremonies and feasts, but very little liquor ever came in there. The drinking started, you might say, at McIntosh. There, the Grassy Narrows people learned to drink from the tracks...that's where they got the taste for it."

Father Lacelle, April 3, 1979.

significant development in the Grassy Narrows economy. The establishment of tourist camps in the area of the English-Wabigoon River shortly after the war, and particularly the opening up of Barney Lamm's Ball Lake Lodge, ushered in seasonal employment suited to the skills and the knowledge of the Grassy Narrows people. The tourist camp operators exploited their Indian guides and cabin women in many ways. The people, accustomed to living off whatever they took from the land, did not yet have enough experience with a cash economy to measure the worth of money or to allocate it among different uses. Thus, they never came back from a summer's hard work in the tourist camps with anything to show for their labour. The "closed system" of earning and spending in the tourist camps, and the semi-feudal nature of the relationship between the Grassy Narrows people and the lodge owners is described in greater detail in the chapter on livelihood.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup>

Chapter 8, see pp. 234-239.

### The New Reserve and Contemporary Conflicts: 1963-Present

The third period in the history of the community's relations with the broader society begins with the relocation of the Grassy Narrows reserve in 1963 and encompasses contemporary Indian-government and Indian-white relationships. In general, this is a period of extraordinarily rapid change in the way of life of a people characterized by: a dramatic alteration in settlement patterns and spatial order; the break-up of the extended family and the shift to nuclear households; the beginning of dependency on externally-administered social services; the change in the nature and functioning of the Chief and Band Council to suit the interests of the white society; and, the sharp decline in the traditional mode of production and the transformation of the economy to one based on the exploitation of social assistance and government employment programs. The spatial, social, and political changes have already been documented in previous chapters, while the changes in the community economy will be discussed in the next chapter. Two aspects of the third period, however, need closer examination at this point, because they deal directly with the relations of the Grassy Narrows people to the broader society. They are: first, the context of federal government policy within which the relocation of Grassy Narrows, and all subsequent programming, must be understood; and second, the effect of the new road (and the access to the new reserve) on alcohol consumption by the Grassy Narrows people and on Indian-white relationships in the town of Kenora.

In the early 1960's, the "Indian problem" was perceived by the top political and bureaucratic leadership within the Indian Affairs Branch of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration to be a problem of "poverty":

"Among many of Canada's Indians, all the classical signs and symptoms of poverty are to be found: underemployment and unemployment, large families, poor health, substandard housing, low levels of education, idleness, an attitude of despair and defeat. To many Indians in northern settlements, these conditions are the only way of life that exists. They have known no other. They accept poverty as they accept the weather."<sup>40</sup>

This analysis, articulated by one of the highest-ranking bureaucrats in the Indian Branch, was followed by a statement that "poverty on Indian reserves can be ended by a [government] program", and that the government therefore must "wage war on Indian poverty".

The assumptions underlying the entire approach to the "Indian problem" are easily discernible from public pronouncements: first, Indians are on a path from a traditional, backward, society to a modern and dynamic one; second, movement along this path is inevitable, irreversible, and of course, beneficial to Indians; third, the appropriate government strategy is to assist the transition to "modernization" primarily by providing physical improvements and social services to Indians on the basis of equality with other Canadians; and fourth, the main barriers along the path to modernization are attitudes and the "culture" of the Indian people; therefore, it is incumbent upon government to change these attitudes if the "war on poverty" is to be won. The specifics of the approach are stated as follows:

"What can we do? We can improve the employability of the individual Indian...have a placement and a relocation service...more industrial development to make jobs for Indians...make a physical and social environment to develop self-respect...provide more social services [welfare, child care] of the sort we naturally assume to be in operation among our own communities....

---

40

Remarks by J.W. Churchman, Director of Development, Indian Affairs Branch, 22 October, 1965. Mr. Churchman was responsible directly to the Deputy Minister of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration; thus he was a very senior official in Indian Affairs.



Programs and policies vital to the elimination of poverty from Indian communities are undergoing review. The first attention is being given to the development of the physical community...housing, planning...Directly this is completed, we shall turn to industrial development and relocation programs, each of which requires expansion.<sup>41</sup>

According to government officials, the attitudes that had to be overcome in the "war on poverty" were as follows: the feeling, among Indians, that "the government owes them a living"; the very poor attitudes to time; the absence of discipline in "showing up for work every day"; the tendency to accuse the Indian Branch of paternalism; and, the attitude to property: "fine house becomes a shack in no time...this problem must be overcome quickly."<sup>42</sup>

Although the specifics of implementing all these elements of the new approach to Indian poverty varied locally, in due course, the policy changes conceived at the national level affected all Indian northern reserves across Canada. The Indian Affairs Branch began new housing programmes, built new schools, encouraged adult education and occupational training courses, and greatly increased other capital expenditures on reserves. In the mid-1960's, "community development" became an important feature of Indian administration policy. At the same time, Indian Affairs began to extend the concept of "local government", already in existence for southern Ontario reserves, to northern communities. This meant that under regulations provided by headquarters, Indian bands could now administer certain programs such as social assistance, band work programs, and so on. In the late 1960's, both federal and provincial government agencies began to hire community workers for this purpose:

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

teachers' aides, native dispensers, band administrators. By the mid-1970's, government became, directly and indirectly, the major employer on Indian reserves across northern Ontario, making Indian people more dependent on government support during this decade than in any other time in history.<sup>43</sup>

It is in the context of the evolution of national policy towards Indian people, and the much increased emphasis on equality of status and opportunity, that the decisions to extend education, housing, and community infrastructure services to remote reserves must be understood.<sup>44</sup> In the case of Grassy Narrows, the resettlement of people from the old reserve to the new reserve was the physical manifestation of national policy goals. The new site provided much easier access to the Grassy Narrows reserve from Kenora by road, and it gave government planners a free hand to arrange people and facilities in a more "modern" and "economically efficient" way. The details of the actual decision to move, the fact that the move seems to have been effected with little

---

43

Extensive documentation on the dramatic increase of government intervention in the affairs of the Fort Hope Band is provided by Paul Driben who states that "while government accounted for only 64% of the band's disposable income in 1969, in 1975, they accounted for almost 90%."

Paul Driben and Robert S. Trudeau, The Fort Hope Experience: The Devastating Impact of Government Intervention in the Affairs of an Indian Band, manuscript in preparation for publication, p. 102.

44

The formal exposition of the new policy was contained in the 1969 White Paper on Indian policy. In the foreword, the Government stated that it "believes that its policies must lead to the full, free and non-discriminatory participation of the Indian people in Canadian society. Such a goal requires a break with the past. It requires that the Indian people's role of dependence be replaced by a role of equal status, opportunity, and responsibility, a role they can share with all other Canadians". Although more dependence on government was completely foreign to the intent of the government, nevertheless the results of the course on which government was embarking would turn out to be quite different.

consultation with band members, and the attitude of the people to the relocation, are matters treated at length in a separate chapter.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, these notes on the external influences on community life of the people at Grassy Narrows during three distinct historical periods would not be complete without some reference to the link between the opening up of road access to the town of Kenora, the change in the way of life on the reserve, and the relationship of the Grassy Narrows people to Indians from other reserves and to the town of Kenora. This subject needs a word of introduction about the town and about the history of the Indians' relationship to its white population.

At first glance, Kenora seems like any other northern Ontario community. Located 120 miles east of Winnipeg and about 300 miles west of Thunder Bay, it is far removed from large urban centers. For miles to its south, north, west, and east, there is nothing but a vast expanse of forests, lakes, and bush. This geographic situation provides an identity for approximately 11,000 people who live in Kenora. They think of themselves as "Northerners", people who cope with a difficult physical environment, especially during the long and severe winters, who love the bush and have prized knowledge of it, who work hard and drink hard, too. Kenora is an old town, as northern towns go. It was established with the building of the transcontinental railway in the late nineteenth century. Because of the town's strategic position in opening up the frontier to white settlement and resource expansion, two provinces fought for it. Kenora was first incorporated by the province of Manitoba in 1882, and then became formally incorporated by the province of Ontario in 1892. Most of its early inhabitants were recent immigrants who worked on railway construction crews: Norwegians, Finns, Ukrainians, Yugoslavs, Poles, Scottish, Irish, English, and Chinese. The various ethnic groups settled into little enclaves in the town, developing a definite pattern of residential segregation along ethnic lines. From the very beginning, therefore, ethnicity was an obvious and important fact of community life.

---

45

The details of the relocation decision are examined in the chapter entitled "Relocation and the Decision-Making Process". See in particular pp. 287-294.

Socially, the character of the community was strongly influenced by the occupational structure and culture of the railroad and the pulp mill. Both employed different classes of workmen, with different degrees of skill, responsibility, and status. Such differences were translated into social divisions which cut across ethnic origins. This patterning of the social structure according to position in the occupational hierarchy was apparently characteristic of many single-industry, resource frontier communities in the Canadian north.<sup>46</sup>

During the first half of the twentieth century, the "Indian presence" in Kenora was welcomed. Only a handful of Indian people lived in town, simply because there were no real opportunities for Indians to participate in the economy of the frontier. Indians from the reserves around Kenora used to come into town only for brief periods of time, primarily to trade or have a holiday, but also to be educated or hospitalized. They constituted no threat either to the social order of the town, or to the economic security of its inhabitants. Their productive efforts, their harvest of fish, wild rice, or berries used in trade, were much appreciated by Kenora businessmen; in addition, Indians were "colourful" and "interesting". The memories of this earlier period of Indian-white contact in Kenora are undoubtedly romanticized, as evident in this excerpt from a book about Indians by a Kenora resident:

"There were happier days for the Indians of Kenora ...They used to come into town on holidays, and sit on the ground with their wares for sale, blueberries, bead work, beautiful art work and leather work. They would pitch their tents in Ridout Bay and walk to town. Their babies were all decked out in beaded ticanoggans and the Indian woman would strap the ticanoggan to her back and carry the baby around.

---

46

Ira M. Robinson, New Industrial Towns on Canada's Resource Frontier, (Chicago: University of Chicago Department of Geography Research Paper, no. 73, 1962). Indeed, Kenora in its early days must have borne a striking resemblance to Sioux Lookout (Crow Lake) in its ethnic composition, association with the railroad, and social structure. An excellent exposition of the development of Crow Lake is given by David H. Stymeist, Ethnics and Indians (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates Limited, 1975), pp. 24-39.

Then when the holiday was over, they would all just disappear. In those days, the white man had respect for the Indian people, and the Indian people had respect for the white man..."<sup>47</sup>

Certainly the construction of the Jones logging road in the late 1950's made it much easier for the Grassy Narrows people to travel between the old reserve and the town of Kenora, and thus come to town more frequently than just on "special occasions".<sup>48</sup> However, two more fundamental and inter-related factors contributed to the significant increase in the transient Indian population in town and the change in the attitude of the "whites" in Kenora towards Indians. These changes resulted, in the first place, from the diversification of the town's economic base. In the decades following the Second World War, both federal and provincial governments established district or regional offices in Kenora. New jobs were created oriented to bureaucratic administration and service. Government became, after the Ontario-Minnesota Pulp and Paper Company, Kenora's second most important industry. In the second place, this development coincided with the greater emphasis in public policy on providing services to native people in the area. Although the town did not "need" Indian people for their labour, in many ways it became heavily dependent upon them as various government agencies were established in town to "serve" the twelve Indian

---

47

Eleanor M. Jacobson, Bended Elbow (Kenora: Central Publications, 1976), p. 37. This book is a highly partisan and negative account of Indians in Kenora, but it gives vent to feelings and perceptions that are widely shared among white residents of the town.

48

Charlie Fobister confirmed that the Grassy Narrows people used to come to Kenora "not very often" before the road was built. In the winter, there were definite walking trails, and in the summer travel was by canoe and portage, but he said "it was hard to get to town, so people only went on special occasions...my father, for example, would walk to town after Christmas to come to see me at St. Mary's residential school...it would take him two days, and he would camp for one night along the trail." Charlie Fobister, March 9, 1979.

communities in the immediate vicinity.<sup>49</sup> Indian people began to come into town much more frequently for medical treatment, schooling, court, and welfare. With the provision of social assistance, unemployment insurance, family benefits, and other transfer payments in the form of cheques, Indian people also demonstrably had more cash to spend in Kenora's retail establishments, restaurants, and beer parlours than ever before. The white population of the town, uninformed about the internal changes in the economy and culture of many reserve communities, reacted only to the external manifestation of the "Indian presence" in town, a presence that rapidly began to be associated with the "Indian problem" of "drunken Indians lying in the streets". By the early 1960's, a pattern of discrimination was well established in Kenora. Indians were tacitly forbidden to use certain hotels or to eat in certain restaurants; other places (like Ted's Café or Ho Ho's Chinese Restaurant) that did not make Indians feel unwelcome became branded as "Indian hangouts". Only certain bars and beverage rooms were open to Indian customers, but even at the Lake of the Woods or the Northland Hotel, Indians and whites were spatially segregated in the bars. On the main streets of the town, Indians became an open target for sneering condescension, verbal abuse, or actual physical assault.

The law dealt most unequally and unfairly with Indian people. The police would invariably arrest an Indian man or woman for intoxication in a public place; a white man or woman, equally inebriated, would receive a reprimand, and might even be driven home. In cases of assault on Indians, white people expected no retribution from the law and rarely received such; Indians, on the other hand, if apprehended after a fight with a white person, would be tried and almost always found guilty of assault. Ultimately, the native person was helpless against the violence

---

49

The government agencies include: Indian Affairs, Department of Manpower, Department of National Health and Welfare (federal government); Ministry of Natural Resources, Ontario Provincial Police, Community and Social Services (provincial government). Other government offices (Justice, Liquor Control Board, Mines, Highways, Transport, Post Office, and so on) serve the Indian and the white populations.

of the whites. This violence occurred both among adults and among the young. Everywhere in town, Indians were confronted with white prejudice and open discrimination. Kenora became a hostile place, a rabidly racist northern community.

This very brief summary of the history of Kenora and of the evolution of Indian-white relationships in the town sets the stage for the discussion of what happened to the Grassy Narrows people after they had been moved to the new reserve and connected to the town by road. First of all, in a very short time, the Jones Road replaced canoe and portage routes as a means of travel between reserve communities. Indians began seeing each other more in Kenora than on their reserves. The traditional axis of orientation of the Grassy Narrows people north, to the more northern Ojibwa around Pekangikum, shifted in a matter of years to much closer contact with the Ojibwa south, around the Lake of the Woods. This development coincided with the general decline of trapping, and the cessation of seasonal migration to the northern traplines.

Second, the Jones Road not only enabled the Grassy Narrows people to get out of the new reserve but it also enabled the more unsavoury elements of the white Kenora society to get in. The taxi-drivers performed the service of transporting people back and forth from the community to Kenora, but they also were involved in the lucrative business of smuggling liquor to a "dry" reserve. Andy Keewatin and Maggie Land state this clearly:

"In the first year after the relocation, nobody bothered us too much. But then when the Kenora people heard that there was money, cash, on the reserve, the taxi-drivers became bootleggers. They started coming in from town bringing a whole load of liquor in. First, they asked you if you were drinking. If you said no, then they said, 'Why don't you try it? Here, I'll give you a bottle free.' Then, they started to sell it. We had a dry reserve then, but it's amazing how much liquor started to get through..."<sup>50</sup>

"The heavy drinking started on the reserve when they opened the road. Bootleggers came. The road made it so easy to get the liquor into the reserve. The road made it easy for people to go to town and drink there."<sup>51</sup>

Long-time Kenora residents confirm the activities of bootleggers on the new reserve and the impact of road access on drinking patterns:

"The drinking at Grassy Narrows really started when they were moved to the road, when the liquor began coming in. The taxi people, they exploited the Indians; they could bring in the booze very easily. The trouble at Grassy really never was related to mercury, but to alcohol, to the road, and to the relocation and the disruption of their way of life."<sup>52</sup>

Third, because Kenora became the focal point for meeting Indians from other reserves and for doing business with government agencies in town, the Grassy Narrows people encountered the same prejudice and discrimination in town that faced all other Indians. The white society of Kenora did not make subtle distinctions between those Indians "who had just come out of the bush", and who were therefore perhaps more vulnerable to acts of overt or covert aggression, and those from other reserves who had been exposed to the disorganizing pressures of white contact sooner. "Good" and "bad" Indians were lumped together as "Indians"; many white people in Kenora denied all Indians their humanity. Those Grassy Narrows people who never left the old reserve and did not live in McIntosh must have felt acutely the tension and hostility

---

<sup>51</sup> Maggie Land, November 26, 1978.

<sup>52</sup> Stu Martin, March 8, 1980. This point of view has also been voiced by Chuck Wingfield, the District Adult Probation officer in Kenora for almost a quarter of the century. In an interview with Mr. Wingfield, he confirmed that up to the time of the relocation, criminal offences by the Grassy Narrows people related to alcohol abuse were exceptional occurrences. After the relocation, however, the Grassy Narrows people made up a substantial proportion of arrests and charges by the police, not only for intoxication, but also for more serious offences like assaults and homicides.



generated against them in town. Indeed, it was the old people of Grassy Narrows who in 1964 came to Kenora to join in a march to protest racial discrimination. This was the first time in the history of Indian-white contact in the town that Indians from different reserves organized a peaceful civil rights demonstration. Andy Keewatin describes this event as follows:

"The march of 1964 was organized by Peter Seymour, an Ojibwa from the Rat Portage reserve. He called all the Chiefs together. He called Mr. Borovoy from the Ontario Human Rights Commission because he wanted to do things in a legal, peaceful, way. About 400 Indian people made the march, about a week before Christmas. Six reserves in the Kenora area were involved. At Grassy Narrows, about half of all the old people went to this march. It started at the Holiday Inn and went by the church and the city council chambers. We made speeches to the mayor and his council.

You see, at that time, Indians were turned out of stores and restaurants in town; there were very few places where Indians could go. It was time to protest the racial discrimination against our people in Kenora.

Two weeks after the march, the politicians said that the march was organized by 'outside influences'. But that's what they said in Georgia too, when the first civil rights marches started. Indians in Kenora were in the same position as the Negroes in the South in the early 1960's."<sup>53</sup>

Indian-white relations in Kenora did not improve as a result of the 1964 march. Paradoxically, racial tensions intensified as a result of the federal government's efforts to establish greater equivalence in

---

53

Andy Keewatin, January 3, 1979. Jack Doner, a lawyer in Kenora, was one of a handful of white people who assisted in preparing for this march. He helped by organizing buses to bring Indian people from the reserves to town.

medical, educational, social, and employment services between the two races. The Kenora people saw only that their "taxpayers' dollars" were going down the drain. They blamed the Indian themselves, not their status or conditions, and they blamed the government:

"You Ojibway are just as much to blame for discrimination as anyone. You're too busy crying over it to get out and do something about it. Let's see you work for a living and build and buy your own homes and pay for your own education. If you want equality seriously, then cut your ties with the government and their juicy grants and free houses - step out into reality from your dream world....

[Indians] are given free education, free houses, free land, free medical, free glasses, free dentistry...and they don't even appreciate it. Instead of caring for personal belongings which we have paid for, they burn down their houses and recreational centers...Admittedly, the Indian people do have a problem, a drinking problem which could be remedied if their hands were kept busy at work.

The blame according to the local [Kenora] people, lays on the shoulders of the federal government. The government pays them [the Indians] and pays them. It buys them...everything, and they still want more. If they hadn't given the Indian so much to begin with, the Indian would still retain his self-sufficiency, his self-reliance and most important, his self-respect."<sup>54</sup>

Therein lies the crux of the matter. The Indians exchanged the services they received from the federal government (housing, schools, jobs, welfare, medical treatment, and so on), which are tangible benefits, for something intangible, namely, independence. As the Indians accepted the goods and services offered to them by the government, they progressively lost their claim to being an independent people. Ultimately, they

lost the ability to make decisions for themselves, at least within the context of the goods and services accepted.<sup>55</sup>

The important aspect of this exchange is that the system intensifies the prejudice of the white community against Indians because they are seen not to be participating "productively" in the economy; rather, they are "getting something for nothing", "they are not working for a living", and even worse, they are seen to be abusing property and money paid by taxpayers' dollars. Thus, the Indians' participation in the system appears as a total violation of all the values and standards of the frontier society: hard work, paying your own way, and being in control of your own life. The white people assert their own moral superiority over the Indians in this regard, while at the same time they criticize the Indians for failing to live up to their own cultural traditions of self-sufficiency. They believe that Indians are poor because they are shiftless, lazy, unreliable, irresponsible, profligate with money and material goods; at the same time, they insist that Indians are this way because they have given up their old customs and values and have not yet adopted new ones prized by the dominant society. White people ignore the historical evidence that it is the very segregation of Indian people geographically, legally, and economically from the mainstream society, combined with the erosion of the traditional economic base of Indian culture, that has led to the present dependence on government bureaucracies.<sup>56</sup> They also ignore the fact that the very bureaucracies working to "help the Indians" are contributing millions of dollars and a substantial number of jobs to the Kenora community economy.

---

55

This point is well made by Stymeist in his discussion of the dimensions and implications of the existing exchange system between Indian people and the organizations of Crow Lake which serve them. Crow Lake, like Kenora, is dependent upon Native people for its present size, complexity, and standard of living. Stymeist, Ethnics and Indians, pp. 84-85.

56

There is, of course, a close connection between government policy with respect to socio-economic development and the unintended result of further alienation of Indians from the productive side of the nation's economy. See in particular the argument developed in chapter 8 which supports the conclusion on page 285.

"I would say that the Indians spend one hell of a pile of money in this town [Kenora]. They keep a lot of businesses going here: groceries, car dealers, sports and hardware shops, taxis, clothing stores, you name it. All you have to do is look at one reserve, Grassy Narrows. The money paid out to that reserve by Indian Affairs alone is over a million dollars a year. How much of that do you think stays in the community? A lot of it goes on wages, but all the materials for construction come from Kenora. People spend their wages to buy from the Bay, but they spend an awful lot of money on taxis and airplane trips to town. They spend too much on booze, and all that money is spent in Kenora. Most of the money finds its way back to this town.

Our Indian Affairs budget, excluding capital but including staff costs, is about \$5.4 million dollars, for O&M alone [Operations and Maintenance]. Add capital, and our budget for the district may be in the neighbourhood of ten million dollars a year. We [Indian Affairs] have a budget equal to, or larger than, the town of Kenora. Where do you think all that money gets spent? I would say that Indians spend anywhere from \$7 to \$8 million dollars in the town of Kenora each year.

And how many white people do you think have jobs servicing the Indians? At one point, we counted 28 different 'social agencies' in Kenora who had something to do with Indians, excluding the Lake of the Woods Hospital...Certainly, many of these jobs would not exist in the community without Indian people in the area. And that's maybe about 600 jobs in total, about half or more of all the jobs in this town. In my opinion, if you took away the Indian reserves, you would close up Kenora."<sup>57</sup>

The tragedy is that the town of Kenora is able to benefit economically from the poverty of Indian people through government programs and services that come "from the outside", but that the entire social system of the town, and its social consciousness, in effect ensures that Indian people cannot escape from a life of economic deprivation on the reserves. Not only is it extremely difficult to find housing and employment in

Kenora, but Indians are informally excluded from virtually every sector of the town's social life. Indians are valuable to Kenora only if they stay on the reserves and continue their dependency relationship on government, for only in this case can agencies based in town continue to provide services for them.

"Prejudice and discrimination are important to the community, for whether or not the people are fully aware of it, the town as a whole is heavily dependent upon the existence of a separate, unequal, and adjacent Native population."<sup>58</sup>

There are no easy solutions to the problem of white prejudice because the feelings have gone far beyond the resentment against the fact that Indians seem to have so much money that is not earned, or that they are just spendthrifts and unreliable workers. The great majority of whites in Kenora today think of Indians as "untouchables", as profane persons. In matters of personal comportment, even cleanliness, whites feel Indians are a "contaminating presence in the town".<sup>59</sup> The diverse manifestations of anti-social behaviour exhibited by intoxicated Indians lead white people to generalize this behaviour to all Indians. The most ordinary interactional courtesies are then neither expected of Indians nor extended to them. All Indians become outcasts; all are incriminated.

---

58

Stymeist, Ethnics and Indians, p. 93.

59

The "contamination" is often expressed with reference to Indian sexual and unsocial behaviour in public, for example:

"Just look at what booze has done to the Indians in Kenora. They openly drink wine right on the street, they urinate and crap all over the main street in town...They are fornicating in the park and behind the court house and the library and in the back lanes in broad daylight. After they get tanked up, they stand around in groups in the doorways of stores so customers can't get in or out...When they use public washrooms, they always manage to spread crap all over the walls...They sleep in boat-houses or on somebody's lawn, or in the parks and drink, drink, drink... Just what do the tourists think when they see these Indians relieving themselves of urine on the sidewalks in broad daylight?"

Eleanor Jacobson, Bended Elbow, p. 22, 24, and 28.

The very category "Indian" is equated with a stigma, a moral destitution. Indians react to their treatment as profane persons in various ways: by withdrawing from white society and seeking a measure of self-regard within the reserve community, by "covering" certain essential characteristics of their "Indianness", or by simply capitalizing on their profaneness in order to win small gains of money, resources, or services from the white society.<sup>60</sup> In the specific situation of Kenora, the Indians' reaction to the incessant undermining of a morally defensible self-image also takes another more self-destructive form. The rage and anger at the racism are turned inwards and translated into violence directed against the Self or against others. The best expression of this thought comes from Louis Cameron, a young Ojibwa Indian and quite a remarkable man, who led the revolt against the Kenora society by taking up arms against it:

"You know, everybody knows, that people have to be free to express human freedom. They have to laugh, they have to yell, and they have to be free to move around. But when you push people into a group like that, a lot of that expression turns inside. It's what you call internal aggression. And as a result of that, Indians live a dangerous style of life. They fight each other, they drink a lot. And the tendency to suicide is higher....

This is the crime, the injustice that is being committed by the government...They are taking one segment of society and pushing it violently inwards."<sup>61</sup>

In 1972, young Indians around Kenora decided that the strategy of non-violent protest advocated by their elders as a means to end discrimination and racism in Kenora had to be changed. They organized themselves into the Ojibway Warrior Society. In July 1974, armed with shotguns and rifles, young "Warriors" occupied Anishinabe Park in Kenora and held it

---

60

An extensive discussion of strategies used by Indians to cope with the image whites have of them can be found in Niels Winther Braroe, Indian & White (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), chapters 6, 7, and 8.

61

Louis Cameron, Anicinabe interview, quoted in "Quicksilver and Slow Death", Ontario Public Interest Research Group, October, 1976, p. 25.

as an armed camp, with barricades of barbed wire at the entrance to the park, for over four weeks. Under a poster bearing the following message:

THIS PIECE OF LAND  
WE STAND ON, IS OUR  
FLESH 'N BLOOD  
BONE 'N MARROW  
OF OUR BODIES, THIS  
IS WHY WE CHOOSE  
TO DIE HERE AT  
ANISHINABE PARK

the Indians claimed that the land of the Park was rightfully theirs and was illegally sold to Kenora.<sup>62</sup> They also demanded more job opportunities for Indian people in the town, an end to discrimination by the townspeople, an end to police brutality and harassment of Indians, an overhaul of operations of Indian Affairs, and a stronger voice by Indian people in DIAND decision making. According to Louis Cameron, the occupation of the park was a symbol, a sign that the Indian people were prepared to fight violence with violence:

"We have to fight that style of life that is detrimental to human beings. So we, the Ojibway Warriors' Society, believe that the only way is to bring that internal aggression outwards. It must go out. We must break through the same way we got in. We got in by violence, we must go out by confrontation."<sup>63</sup>

The confrontation in the park was not well regarded by the old people of Grassy Narrows who had participated in the 1964 civil rights march. They felt that the end did not justify the means. They also felt that the

---

62

The Park had originally been purchased by Indian Affairs as a camping area for Indians travelling between the reserves and Kenora. In 1959, the town purchased the land from the government and developed it as a tourist area. The Ojibway Warriors claimed that the park was sold without the permission of the Indian people, and that they had legal and moral rights to the land.

63

Louis Cameron, Anicinabe interview, "Quicksilver and Slow Death", p.26.

situation was influenced too strongly by the leaders of the American Indian Movement (A.I.M.).

"Anishinabe Park. We did not feel, at Grassy Narrows, that it was the right thing to do at the time. Not even ten people from our reserve participated in the occupation of the park; it was only the young militants, like David Fobister and Tommy Keesick, who went to the park. I also feel that the entire thing was too much influenced by Harvey Major and Dennis Banks of A.I.M. because they had been at Wounded Knee, and they had their own ideas about how to do things in Kenora. The occupation of the park got out of control. All that happened was a backlash by the Kenora people."<sup>64</sup>

Since the occupation of Anishinabe Park, very little has changed in Kenora. The town continues to exclude Indians from its economic and social life. For Indians locked into the reserve system, for the people of Grassy Narrows, the town's racism in interaction with government policies that sustain soul-destroying dependency, may yet provoke a much wider consensus in the community that perhaps the Young Warriors were right. The time may come when the way out of the entrapment is by the way in, with violence answered by violence.

---

<sup>64</sup>

Andy Keewatin, January 3, 1979. The Kenora backlash came in the form of the book, Bended Elbow, by Eleanor Jacobson. She wrote, "The U.S. have their 'Wounded Knee' but Canada has its 'Bended Elbow', Kenora, Ontario."



Chapter 8.

LIVELIHOOD: CHANGES IN THE MODE OF PRODUCTION

In our exploration so far of the way of life of the Grassy Narrows people before their relocation, it has become increasingly manifest that the old reserve way of life achieved a remarkable degree of integration between aspects of life which we designate as social, political, religious, or economic. For the sake of description, it was necessary to divide the whole into its parts and bring forward first one aspect and then another, so that the totality we were seeking to understand could be captured in written form. In the fabric of the Indian society, however, all these things were inter-connected. While attention was focused on the spatial order of the old reserve, for example, it became evident that the organization of space was related to the social order, and that the social order was connected to conceptions of property and to hunting and trapping activities. Similarly, certain religious ideas and practices were found to be central to the pursuit of livelihood. Specific productive skills, gained through contact with a personal manito, were related to conceptions of manhood, to conditions for political leadership, and to notions of social responsibility. Each aspect of the old reserve way of life seemed to be knotted into a firm relationship with every other aspect, connected in both symbolic and practical ways, yet not subject to any single overriding rule or principle. Precisely because the mode of livelihood was so intertwined with other aspects of the culture, and also influenced by relations with the outside society, a substantial amount of information about the economy of the old reserve has been presented in antecedent chapters.

This chapter examines in detail the nature of the transformation of the economy of Grassy Narrows since the move to the new reserve. The information to be presented falls naturally into two parts. The first

part deals with the structure of the economy of the old reserve. Guiding, commercial fishing, and off-reserve wage labour merit special consideration because these activities were integrated into the pattern of livelihood of the Grassy Narrows people only since the end of the Second World War. Supporting data are provided in a number of statistical tables and graphs which document the decline in trapping, the most important sector in the traditional economy. It will be shown here that, before the relocation and during the post-war period, the people of Grassy Narrows continued to live primarily from the land by hunting, trapping, fishing and gathering, supplemented by occasional or seasonal wage labour.

The second part of this chapter focuses on the structure of the economy of the new reserve. The nature and extent of the break with the traditional mode of production will be illustrated by a data series derived from an extensive survey of the community in 1977. Because there are substantial gaps in the available statistical information on the reserve economy by year and by sector since the relocation, these 1977 data have to serve as our point of reference for judging how the changes resulting from government policy in the mid-1960's have displaced the traditional mode of production and created an economy based almost entirely on the exploitation of government subsidies. Unless otherwise stated, the statistical data on the contemporary economy are derived from my own field research and interview material.

### A Sectoral Description of the Old Reserve Economy

The economy of the old reserve of Grassy Narrows was distinguished by seasonal activities oriented to subsistence, commodity trade, and occasional wage employment. No single activity characterized any one seasonal period, yet each period was associated with a particular configuration of activities. November, for example, was the time of movement of families from the settlement to the trapline. Until the mid-1950's, dogteams and snowshoes were still a common form of transport, replaced later by small aircraft and snowmobiles. November and December were months of intensive trapping for fur-bearing animals; around the time of Christmas people returned to the reserve to sell their furs, obtain supplies, visit each other and have a community feast. Late winter, stretching from mid-January to the end of March or early April, was the most difficult part of the year because of the severe cold, the seclusion of game, and the isolation of the trapline. Yet most families returned to the winter camp and continued trapping, though less intensively. The late winter was a good time for snaring rabbits, ice-fishing, and hunting for moose. When the temperatures started to rise above freezing and signs of spring appeared, families returned to the old reserve. The men went spring trapping for muskrat and beaver, using rifles and shotguns instead of steel traps. Hunting for moose and deer under certain early spring weather conditions ("when the proper crust forms on the snow") was combined with hunting for ducks and geese as the first open water appeared and the birds made their way north. By the end of May, the Grassy Narrows families re-assembled on the old reserve for the celebration of Treaty Day.

Spring on the old reserve was a time of planting; every family had a vegetable garden. Potatoes were the favourite crop, although corn, turnips, and carrots were also cultivated. In mid-May, when the tourist lodges catering to sports fishermen opened, many Grassy Narrows men were employed as guides, while some women worked as cabin girls. Although the fishing season stretched from mid-May to the end of September, the busiest time for guides was from mid-May to mid-July and during the

month of September. When the waters were too warm for sports fishing, during July and August, the berries ripened. Whole families camped alongside the picking areas, using the opportunity to socialize and to "make merry".<sup>1</sup> September was the month for the harvest of wild rice, a precious and sacred crop for the Ojibwa. When the harvest of rice was completed, a period of intense domestic activity began: gardens were harvested, rice processed, and fish and meat smoked or dried for the winter. Men no longer employed as guides during the October hunting season went hunting for moose and deer. Some worked as commercial fishermen. Others fished throughout the season for domestic consumption and for commerce. Autumn was a period of preparation for the winter and the move to winter camp. In November, the annual cycle began again.

This condensed review of the annual cycle sets the stage for the consideration of the old reserve economy on a sector by sector basis. First, we will examine those traditional activities directly affected by the relocation, namely, gardening, hunting, and trapping. The availability of wage employment and welfare on the new reserve also brought about the in-migration of Band members who had been previously settled elsewhere. Next, we will analyze guiding and commercial fishing as important sources of income that were severely affected by the 1970 discovery of mercury in the river system.

---

<sup>1</sup> Father Lacelle had this observation about the berry-picking period at Grassy Narrows: "Because mid-summer was kind of a slow period for them [the Grassy Narrows people], they used to socialize a lot before blueberry picking started. They would get into the picking areas about ten days before the berries were ready, and they would have all kinds of games and dances. Of course, this also happened around rice-picking time. There were two or three occasions in the course of the year where socializing would be combined, in a natural way, with economic activity. Social life there was not independent of economic life. During these occasions, I would say that it was like clockwork — most of the children would be born nine months later." Father Lacelle, April 3, 1979.

### Gardening

One of the most widely and frequently lamented losses arising from the relocation is the loss of the family garden plot.<sup>2</sup> On the new reserve, cultivation is not possible because the soil is very poor ("just rock and dirt") and not suitable or sufficiently productive to support a garden; and, because in planning the town-site, the government situated the houses much too close together and left no space for garden plots. As Andy Keewatin said, "even if someone tried to make a garden on this bad soil, it would fail...the kids and the dogs would destroy it soon enough."<sup>3</sup> In consequence, there have been virtually no family gardens at Grassy Narrows since the relocation. In the late 1970's, several attempts were made, using government grants, to cultivate vegetables on a two-acre site on the old reserve. This "community garden" quickly became just another "government project" with Band members working for hourly wages. The project was unsuccessful and was abandoned after three years.

### Hunting

Hunting on the old reserve was usually combined with some other activity, but moose and deer were taken in special hunting trips carried out in the late fall and early winter. Ducks and geese were hunted in the fall and spring. During the trapping season when families were spread out in bush camps over large tracts of territory, a trapper checking his traps could pick up the tracks of a deer or moose on the trail and go hunting. In the summertime, a man might carry his rifle with him on a fishing trip in the hope of surprising a moose feeding along the river bank. Moose meat was (and still is) highly prized by the

---

<sup>2</sup>

Without exception, everyone interviewed at Grassy Narrows in the course of my field work mentioned the loss of gardens, and the loss of the ability to grow one's own food, as a major negative consequence of the relocation.

<sup>3</sup>

Andy Keewatin, January 5, 1979.

Grassy Narrows people for its taste and for the abundance of meat provided by a single animal. Accompanied by wild rice and bannock, moose meat was traditionally served in community banquets and on special family occasions like the naming ceremony and the burial feast. Very high status accrued to the successful hunter in the community.

Hunting activity declined significantly after the move to the new reserve. This conclusion is based on interviews with trappers and conversations with the resident missionaries; the general trend, moreover, is confirmed by available statistical data, even though such data are sketchy and not fully reliable. One expert, using statistics provided by the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) of the Province of Ontario on the average annual moose kill on reserves, has noted that "the average annual reported moose kill at Grassy Narrows between 1965 and 1970 was 140. This is thought by present informants to be a reasonable figure. [However,] it is well below the harvest levels of the 1950's and earlier."<sup>4</sup> Although caution is needed in accepting the MNR data literally, it is certain that the moose harvests in the 1950's at Grassy Narrows were considerably higher than harvests in the late 1960's and 1970's. MNR no longer records moose harvests by Indian people.

The decline in hunting activities after the move to the new reserve occurred for a number of reasons:

"Here, around the new reserve, how are you going to hunt? We're too crowded here. On the old reserve, where people used to live far apart, anyone could go out hunting for moose, deer, rabbits, what have you, anytime, and not disturb nobody else, and there would be enough for everybody. You can't do that anymore.

---

<sup>4</sup> Peter Usher, et. al., "The Economic and Social Impact of Mercury Pollution on Whitedog and Grassy Narrows Indian Reserves, Ontario"; Unpublished paper, 1979, p. 188. Usher warns against too literal an interpretation of MNR statistics because the recorded moose harvests in the 1950's seem extraordinarily high "with some trappers reporting 50 to 100 moose per year" (p. 150). He concludes, however, that all the data are probably adequate for identifying trends, and the trend is that much higher harvests of moose were reported in the 1950's.

Now there's too many white hunters around. There's too many people hunting right around the reserve. We're too close to the Jones Road, and everybody else uses the same road. Now there's no deer or moose around like there used to be. You have to go far into the bush to find one."<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, with the decline of trapping, hunting activities could no longer be easily combined with other work in the bush. Hunting took special effort, and the incentive to hunt for food was progressively diluted as families received enough cash through government subsidies to buy canned meat from the Hudson's Bay store.

### Trapping

The decline of trapping activity over time can be observed by reference to two inter-related indicators. The first one relates to trapline registration; the second is based on the level of production, or fur harvest, from the traplines of the Grassy Narrows Band.

In 1947, when traplines (i.e., territories within which people trapped) were first registered by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, the Grassy Narrows Band was allocated a total of 36 traplines in the Kenora and Red Lake district areas. As a condition of continued trapline use and occupancy, each trapper was obligated to report his previous year's harvest of fur to MNR district offices. Usually, this report accompanied an application for the renewal of a trapping licence. The annual fur harvest, moreover, had to meet or approximate the agreed-upon quotas for certain species, particularly beaver, set for the trapline in the previous year. Repeated failure on the part of the trapper to achieve his quota of fur or to file a report to MNR would result in the forfeit of the trapline and its transfer to someone else.

The records on trapline registration show that the greatest loss of traplines due to inadequate levels of production took place in the

decade of the 1970's. Over the 1947-77 period, the Band lost 9 of its traplines: one in the 1950's; two in the 1960's; and six in the 1970's. Other traplines in the Kenora area did not pass into the hands of non-Indian users but were consolidated. Figure II:1 is a map showing the traplines held by the Band in 1977 in the Kenora area.

The second indicator of trapping activity over time is the level of production for each trapline, aggregated to the community level. File cards on individual traplines are kept by the MNR office in Toronto. Although there are some problems in interpreting MNR data, these records are nevertheless an invaluable and comprehensive source of information on trends in trapping activity. Figures II:2, II:3, and II:4 capture the historical pattern in the fur harvest of the three most economically important species (beaver, mink, and muskrat) from all traplines registered to Grassy Narrows Band members over a thirty-year period.<sup>6</sup> The data show that from the time of the relocation in the mid-1960's to the end of the decade, the Band's production of furs had become erratic and by the mid-1970's, the harvest of furs, especially mink and muskrat, had dropped sharply.

---

6

I am indebted to Peter Usher for the first three graphs only (Figures II:2 to II:4). In order to collect information on the fur catch, he went through MNR files on individual traplines, collected the data and then aggregated it to the community level. It is important, therefore, to include here his comments on the reliability of MNR data:

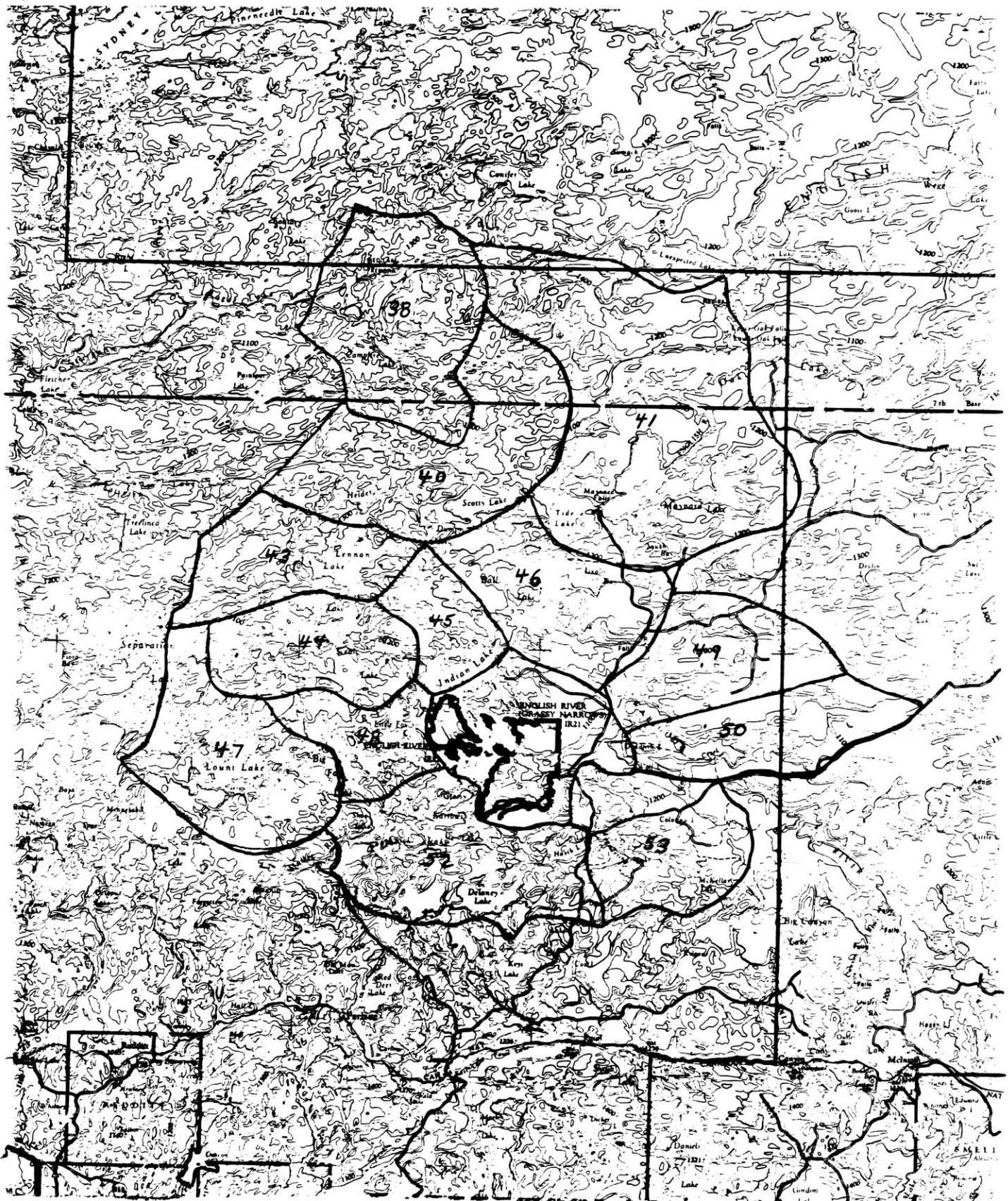
"There are several problems in interpreting [MNR] data....It is clear from trappers' own recollections, and the District Annual Reports, especially from the 1950's, that the new system [of trapline registration] was not working as well as intended. There are references every year to both the failure of many trappers to report at all, and the uncertain reliability of those reports that were submitted. There is no way of knowing whether a nil report for any particular trapline means the owner did not trap, or simply did not submit a report. Nor is there any way of knowing whether non-reporting trappers were representative of the group as a whole...To the degree that some furs were retained for domestic use, or that beaver was taken for food out of season, these figures would provide an underestimate of total harvests....In 1971, MNR made major revisions to its recording system. The fur records since 1971 probably provide reliable estimates of the actual catch...All the data are probably adequate for identifying trends, with possible minor exceptions prior to 1971, except that 1971 constitutes a clear break in their relative reliability for absolute volumes of production. Consequently, pre-1971 fur harvests were higher to an unknown degree in comparison to post-1971 harvests."

Peter Usher, "Economic and Social Impact of Mercury Pollution", pp. 149-153.



Figure II:1

TRAPLINES HELD BY THE GRASSY NARROWS BAND IN THE KENORA AREA: 1977

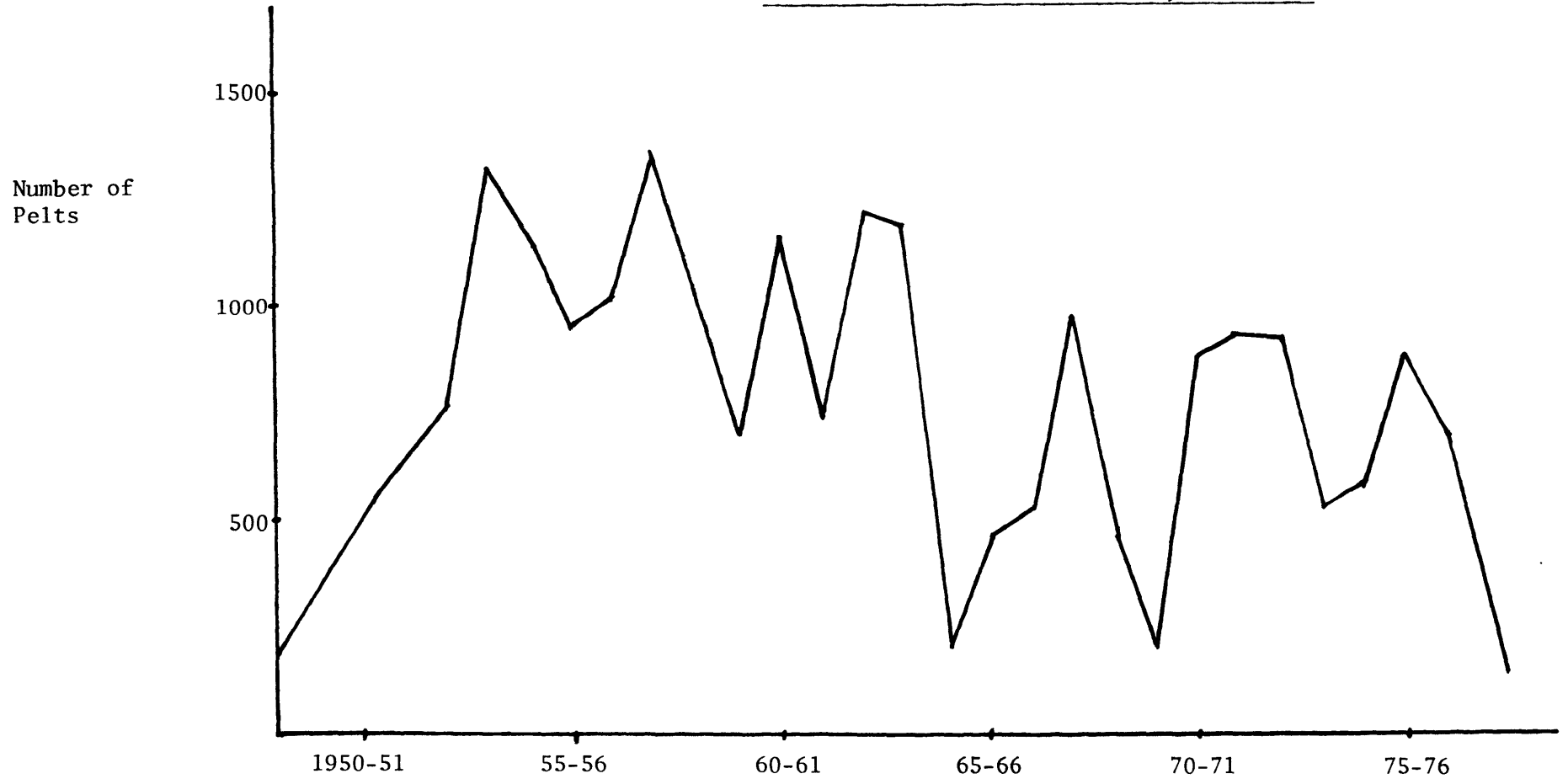


Scale: One inch equals six miles

Source: Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Kenora District

Figure II:2

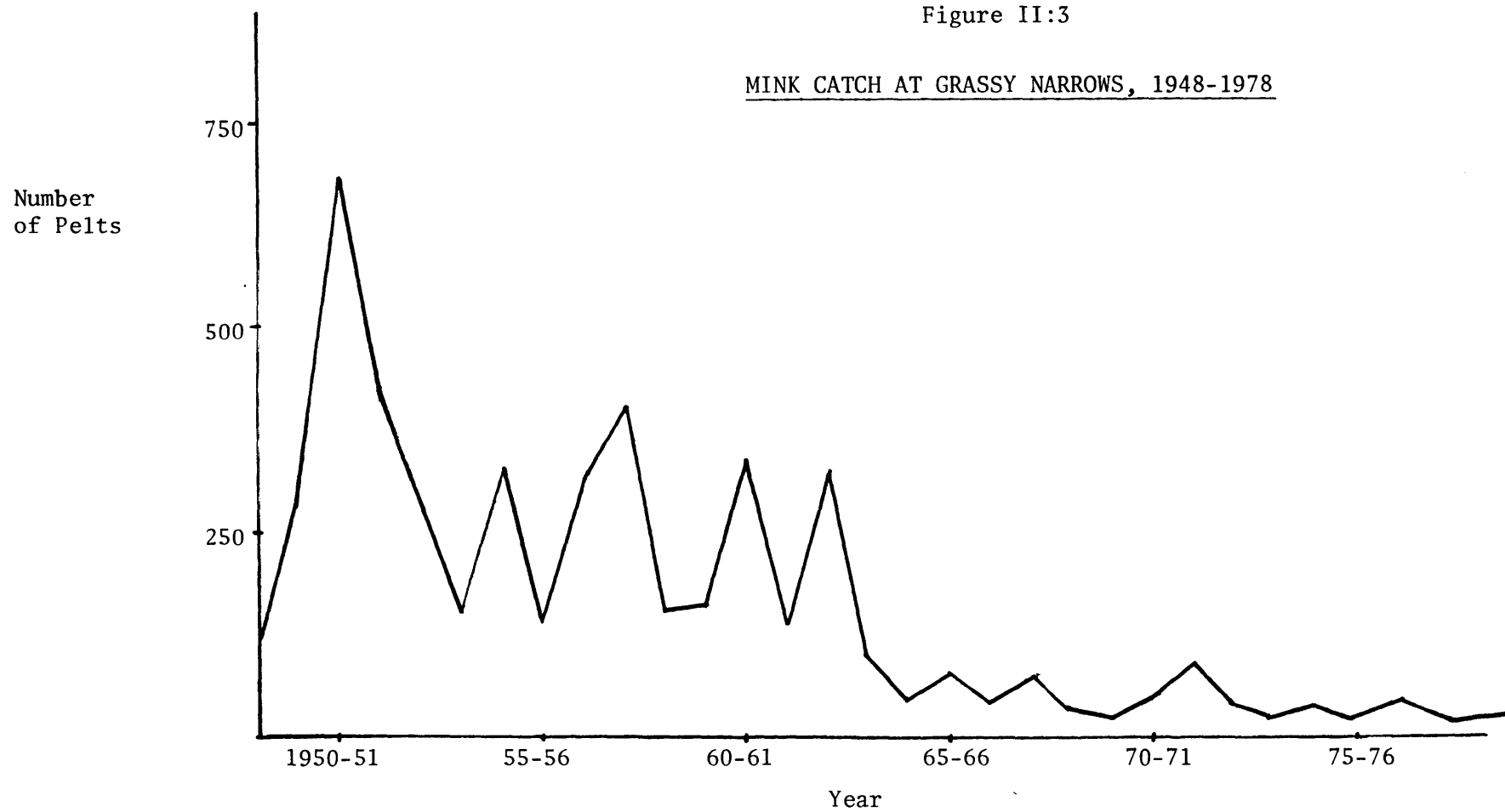
BEAVER CATCH AT GRASSY NARROWS, 1948-1978



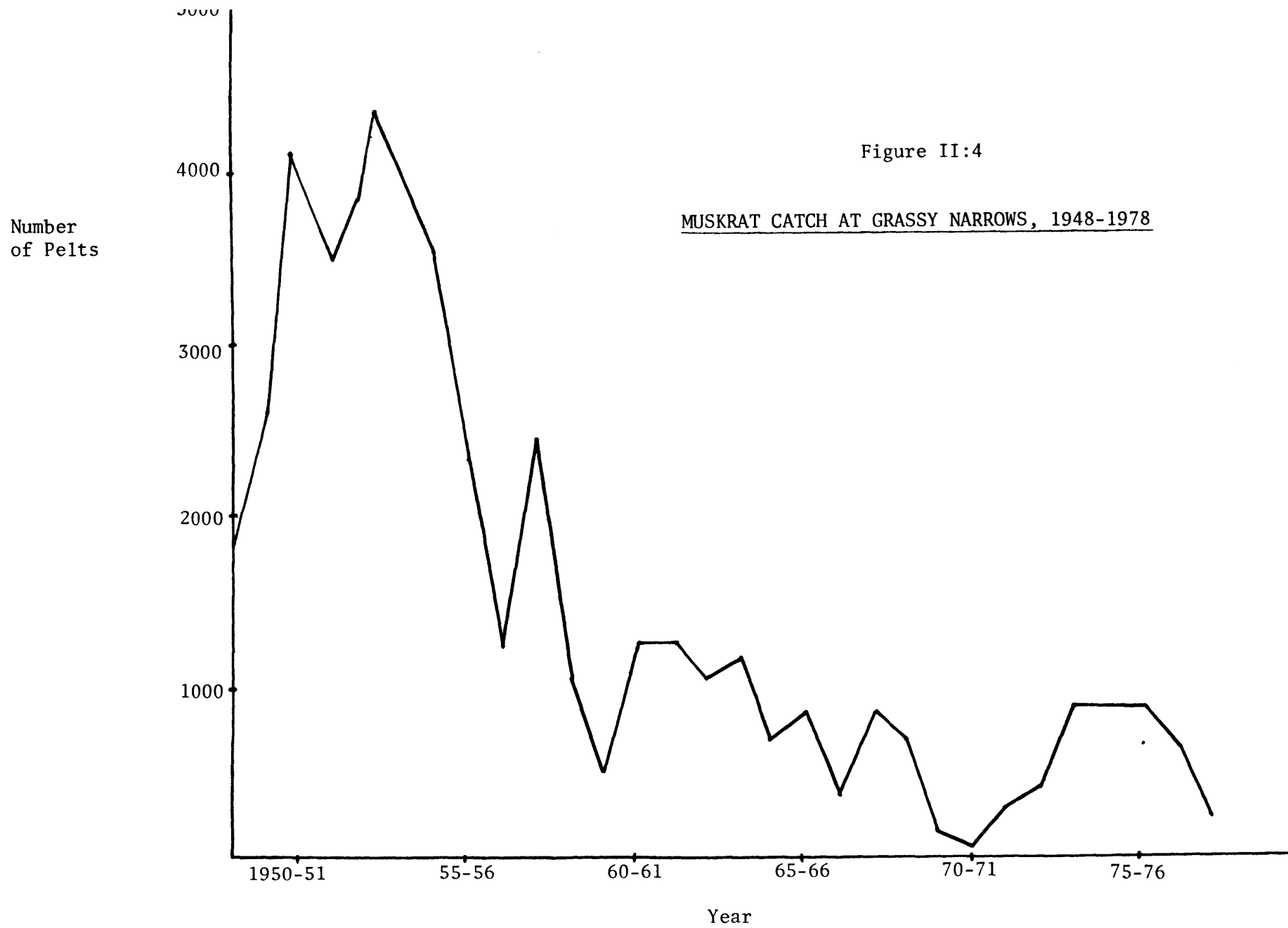
Data Source: Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources

Figure II:3

MINK CATCH AT GRASSY NARROWS, 1948-1978

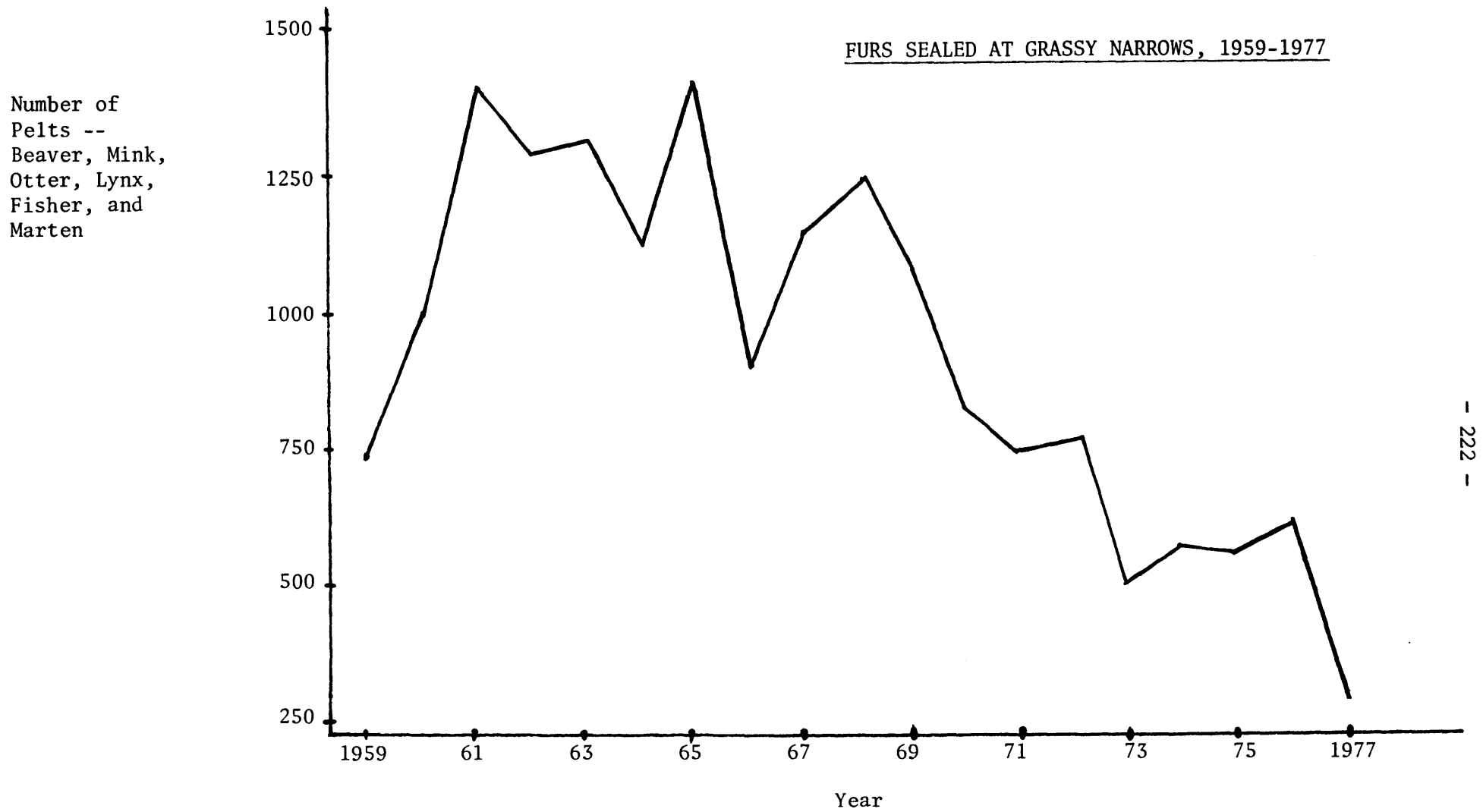


Data Source: Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources



Data Source: Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources

Figure II:5



Data Source: Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources

Figure II:5 is based on a different set of data, namely the total number of furs sealed at Grassy Narrows over the 1959-1977 period.<sup>7</sup> These data exclude muskrat pelts but include other commercial furs such as otter, fisher, lynx, and marten, in addition to beaver and mink. The pattern of the number of furs sealed at Grassy Narrows confirms the pronounced decline in trapping activity in the decade following the relocation.

The effect of the relocation on trapping is perhaps best illustrated by the trend in the harvest of mink. Mink is a fall and winter fur and its harvest therefore indicates how many trappers are on their traplines during this season. The data on the mink harvest (Figure II:3) show that, despite fluctuations from year to year, the average annual harvest of mink was considerably higher in the years preceding relocation than in the years following it. Furthermore, the production levels before the mid-1960's were never again recovered after the move to the new reserve.

Muskrat trapping (Figure II:4) was negatively affected in the late 1950's by water-level fluctuations on the English-Wabigoon rivers. Following the damming of the rivers, the Lake of the Woods Control Board raised or lowered water levels in line with its own requirements for flood control and power generation, with little heed for the effects of these fluctuations on the wild rice crop or on the supply of muskrats. Muskrats were alternatively flooded or frozen to death as a result of sudden fluctuations in water levels. After the 1958 flooding, muskrat catches declined dramatically; they have fluctuated around a much lower average harvest level ever since.

The harvest of beaver (Figure II:2) was not as critically affected by the relocation as the harvest of mink. A possible explanation is that Grassy Narrows trappers have substituted spring shooting of beaver

---

7

Only furs that are "sealed" with an official stamp confirming their production from a registered trapline are eligible for sale.

for fall and winter trapping on the traplines. In April and May, many trappers now leave the reserve for a few days at a time to shoot beaver. This adaptation to the environment of the new reserve, however, no longer represents trapping as a way of life.

The decline of trapping is not a development unique to the Grassy Narrows community. A downward spiral in trapping activity has also been documented for the Whitedog and Fort Hope reserves and observed for other northern Ontario Indian Bands.<sup>8</sup> All these communities, whether or not they were relocated, have felt the impact of the establishment of on-reserve schools and the creation of "town-sites" for year-round residence on reserves. The following observation on the reason for the decline of trapping in the Fort Hope Band is also applicable to the analysis of the situation at Grassy Narrows:

The construction of schools had a tremendous impact on the band. With no forethought or planning the government had created an entirely new environment, and one immediate effect was that it caused a far-reaching change in settlement patterns...Permanent settlements and a more sedentary lifestyle were the outcome.

The impact on trapping was predictably devastating. It is almost certain that the downward

---

8

Paul Driben documents, with statistical evidence over the 1949-1970 period, a sharp decline in the harvest of beaver and mink for the Fort Hope Band. The decline began in 1963-64 and continued well into the 1970's. Although the Fort Hope Band was never relocated, still it did not escape the negative consequences of government policy. Paul Driben and Robert S. Trudeau, The Fort Hope Experience: The Devastating Impact of Government Intervention in the Affairs of an Indian Band, manuscript prepared for publication in 1981, pp. 84-85.

Peter Usher documents similar trends in trapping activity at Whitedog. Usher, "Social and Economic Impact of Mercury Pollution", pp. 183-185.

spiral in trapping [at Fort Hope] can be traced directly to the schools, and this was something that the DIA [Department of Indian Affairs] never anticipated."<sup>9</sup>

The schools, the new houses in the new town-sites, the new infrastructure and community facilities that were the components of the "community development" emphasis in policy-making in the middle 1960's reflect an ideology that equates development with modernization and expresses the belief that "the Indian problem" is located within the Indian communities themselves.

"The town-site developments would mean a massive up-lift of the Indian communities, as the more 'progressive' Indians would be attracted to the well-equipped houses, work in the industries to be established adjacent to the town-site, and send their children to the new schools built within the town-site. The 'progressives' would provide an irresistible example to the more 'backward' Indians, who would then move into the town-sites as well. And so the 'Indian problem' would disappear."<sup>10</sup>

Indian people all over Ontario and perhaps in Canada as a whole were not asked to choose whether to continue the traditional lifestyle or to move to the new town-sites. Many were subjected to the threat that family allowances would be cut off for parents who did not send their children to school. A long-term employee of the Department of Indian Affairs candidly admitted:

---

<sup>9</sup> Driben and Trudeau, The Fort Hope Experience, p. 78, 84.

<sup>10</sup> This is Yngve Lithman's characterization of the ideology that permeated what he calls a "new era" in the history of Indian administration starting in the middle 1960's. Lithman's work, oriented towards a study of the interaction between Indians and whites, is based on his field work at Fort Alexander, an Ojibwa Indian community in northern Manitoba. This Band was not relocated as such, but did get a "new town-site" in the mid-1960's which, in Lithman's opinion, "caused a massive shift of community interests and sentiments." Yngve Georg Lithman, The Community Apart, (Stockholm: University of Stockholm, Department of Social Anthropology, 1978), p. 175.



"At Grassy, we mixed the people all up when we started building schools. We mixed them all up because we went in there and we insisted, backed up by force and coercion, that their traplines were no good for their children, and that they had to bring their children to our schools. So, of course, a lot of the fellows fell away from the trapline because now their family had to stay on the reserve. And that's the way we disrupted their whole way of life. That was the beginning of it, of the loss of their culture....I feel strongly that we moved too fast, and that we continue to move too fast. We expect more of the Indians than we do of ourselves."<sup>11</sup>

At Grassy Narrows and possibly in other Indian communities, if the threat of financial reprisals constituted the proverbial "stick" in the enforcement of compulsory school attendance, then the "carrot" was supplied in the form of a promise, on the part of government officials, to deliver welfare and wage jobs on the new reserve. Some Grassy Narrows elders even blame welfare for their alienation from the land and their traditional way of life:

"It was on the new reserve that welfare started in a big way. Before that, only the old and the sick got rations...vouchers for food that could be bought at the Bay. Since the move to the new reserve, people don't want to go hunting or trapping anymore. They just sit around. People are becoming less Indian. This is all on account of welfare."<sup>12</sup>

On the old reserve, the government's total cash input into the economy had been limited to treaty payments, old age pensions and monthly family allowances which were introduced after the Second World War. The major shift in Indian administration policy in the mid-60's involved a large

---

<sup>11</sup> Stu Martin, March 8, 1980, in Kenora, Ontario.

<sup>12</sup> John Kokopenace, March 7, 1979. The attitude of "blaming welfare" for many of the reserve's ills is fairly prevalent among the older generation. "Welfare is not Indian", "welfare makes people lazy", are very common remarks; "being on welfare" also guarantees low status in the community.

increase in funds deployed directly on reserves. The consequences of this new policy direction were inevitable; as Bands turned away from trapping, they began to be increasingly dependent on economic activities consistent with schools and year-round residence on the reserve, namely welfare and government-funded make-work projects.

The conclusion that emerges from the academic literature, the views of Indian people, and the statements of government officials is that, at Grassy Narrows and elsewhere in the country, the decline in trapping was a direct consequence of a government policy of establishing schools and providing enabling conditions for sedentary residence on reserves. This apparent consensus on the central role of government policy, however, ignores the possibility that the decline in trapping activity might also have been the result of a depressed market for furs and declining prices for fur pelts during the mid-1960's and thereafter. Some insight on the role of prices in trapping activity is provided by the trend in average prices paid for pelts of different species in the 1948-1978 period.<sup>13</sup> The statistics on beaver, mink, and muskrat are presented graphically in Figures II:6 and II:7.

These graphs show that prices for fur pelts, presented here in current dollars, declined steadily and sharply throughout the decade of the 1950's. With prices stated in constant dollars, their fall would appear even steeper and recovery less impressive. The data suggest that the substantial drop in the mink catch at Grassy Narrows was coincident with the fall in average prices of mink. The relative stability in

---

13

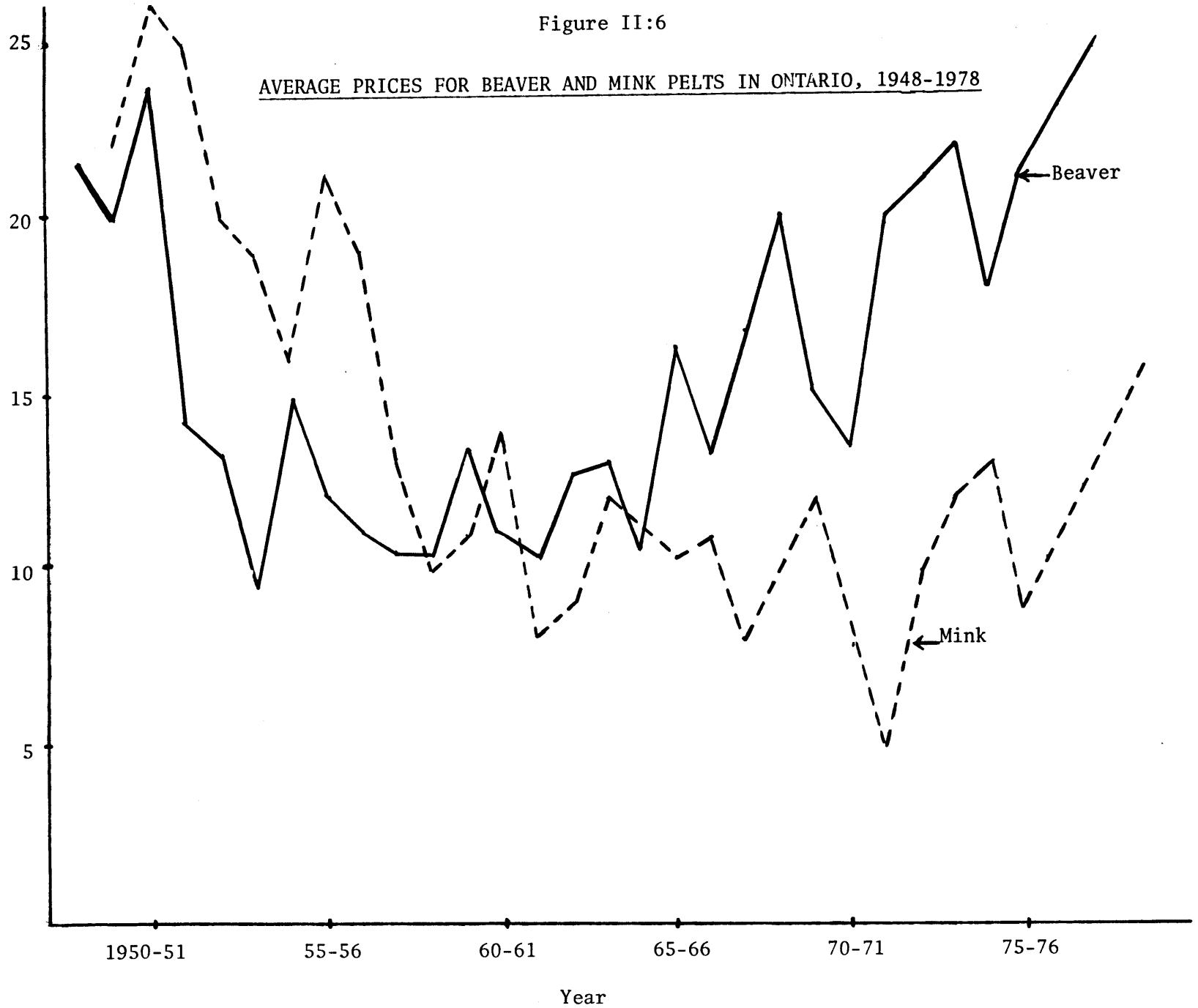
The price paid for a fur pelt of any species will, of course, vary according to the quality, colour, and size of the pelt. In addition, the price will vary depending on the location of the sale. Prices paid for furs at the North Bay Fur Auction are normally higher than the prices paid locally by the Hudson's Bay manager. All things considered, however, average prices for furs of different species paid each trapping season are adequate for establishing trends in the market for furs.

Figure II:6

AVERAGE PRICES FOR BEAVER AND MINK PELTS IN ONTARIO, 1948-1978

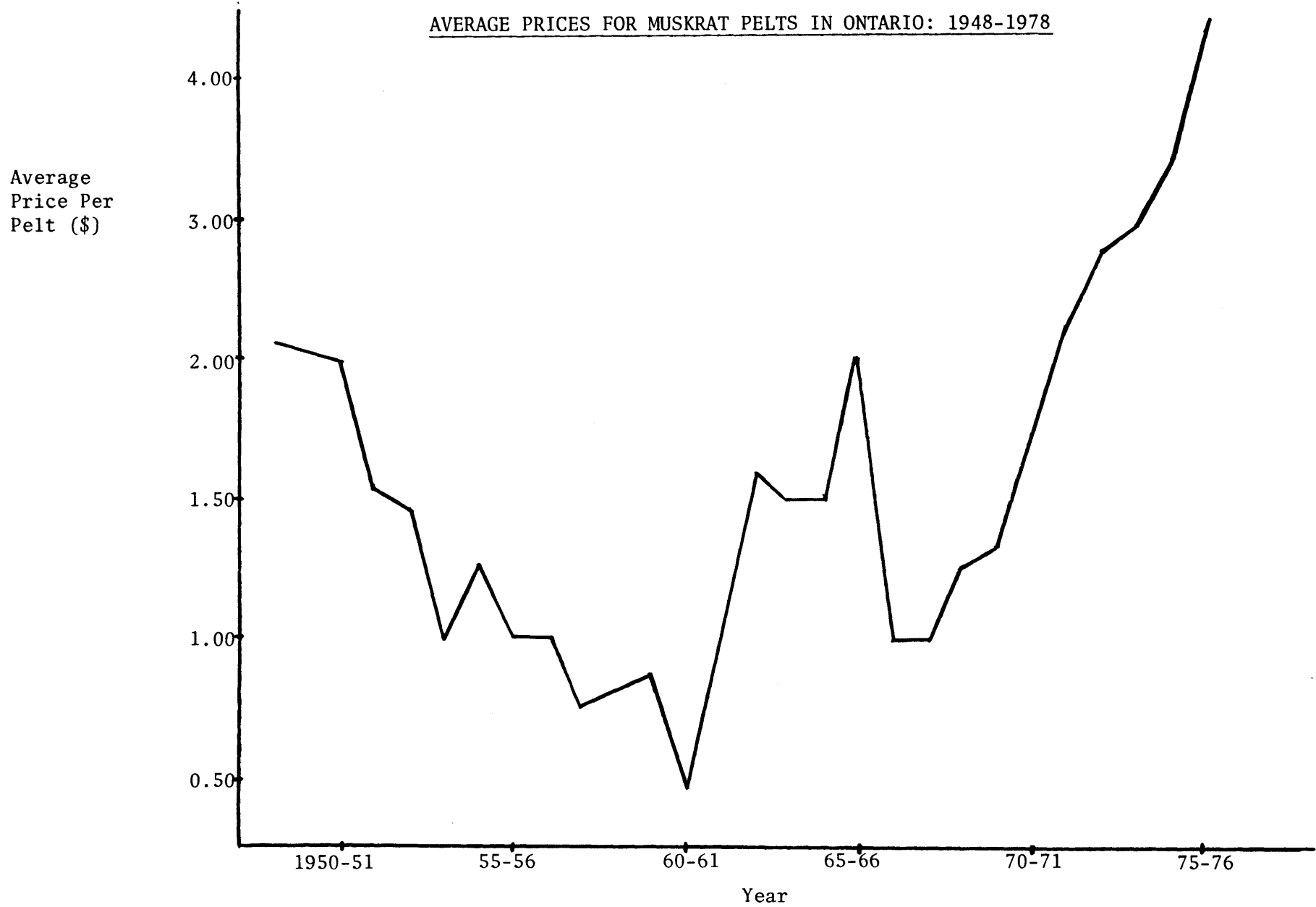
Average  
Price Per  
Pelt (\$)

— Beaver  
--- Mink



Data Source: Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources

Figure II:7



Data Source: Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources

production levels between the mid-1950's and the mid-1960's may be related to the absence of alternative ways of making a living on the old reserve. During the decade of the 1950's, many younger Band members also left the old reserve to seek wage employment on the railroad crews near McIntosh or in the mines at Red Lake. Since prices for mink pelts remained relatively low until the mid-1970's, it is clear that the economic incentive to continue the pattern of winter residence on the trapline could not outweigh the pressures to remain on the reserve generated by the establishment of the school. Indeed, given both the low prices for fur and the uncertain income from trapping, it made good economic sense for the individual trapper to get a government-sponsored job on the new reserve or to apply for welfare. Economically rational behaviour dictates that, in a choice between trapping and wage labour/welfare on reserve, wage labour/welfare is the preferred course of action.

With regard to the beaver harvest, the relatively higher prices for beaver pelts in the 1960's and 1970's tended to support a more steady average level of production of beaver. Spring shooting of beaver, moreover, does not require the constancy of effort and the loneliness of residence that is called for on the trapline. The pattern of trapping for muskrats, however, does not show a positive relationship between price and trapping effort. The substantial rise in prices for muskrat pelts since the mid-1960's was not reflected in increased muskrat catches. The brief recovery in the early 1970's was not continued, and we do not know enough about price, demand, and the supply of muskrats to arrive at a statement of the factors affecting the muskrat harvest.

The conclusion which emerges from the data is that the pressures to break with the way of life on the trapline associated with government policy and the move to the new reserve were not counterbalanced by opposing forces aligned with the maintenance of the trapping culture. The security of a reasonable return for trapping effort might have made a significant difference in the case of the Grassy Narrows Band.

Off-Reserve Wage Labour

Before proceeding to a description of post-war developments in the economy of the old reserve, let us look at the experience of those families who left the reserve. The trajectory of the movement off the reserve, here illustrated by the experience of the Ashopenace and Pahpasay families, demonstrates the importance of the railroad in providing employment, the clustering of families around McIntosh, and the reasons for the eventual return to reserve life. The first speaker is Richard Ashopenace, 55 years old; the second is Marcel Pahpasay, 47 years old.

"I was born on the old reserve, but my whole family moved to McIntosh in the 1930's. McIntosh at that time was like another settlement. There were many Grassy people there. They used it as a base camp and went winter trapping from there. This was the time that many children were in residential school.

I went to McIntosh residential school for seven years. After my schooling was over, I had many jobs. Like other people from Grassy, I worked on the railroad as a section man. I guided around McIntosh for about nine years. I worked at Red Lake in the mines, cut pulp for private contractors, and made a living in various jobs off the reserve. There was no welfare at that time on the old reserve, so some people had to go outside to work. But everyone used to come back for Treaty Day.

I came back to the old reserve in 1959. For two years, I was a commercial fisherman and fished year-round. I also had a trapline near Redditt, guided hunters, and worked on private pulp-cutting contracts. When they started building houses on the new reserve, I worked in construction. And when the training courses started with Manpower, I went on these courses.

When the life became good on the new reserve, when people found out that jobs and houses were available, they started coming back to Grassy Narrows."<sup>14</sup>

"For a long time, the only job you could get on the old reserve was hauling goods from the CNR railway tracks for the Bay Company. You had to work hard for \$2.50 a day. In 1943, my dad took the whole family and he went to work for the CNR railroad in the summertime. We lived at Brinka, close to Redditt, then at Farlane, and at Jones. In the wintertime, dad took us to his trapline and there he taught me how to trap. After working outside the reserve like this for seven years, dad got laid off, and we returned to the old reserve. He then got a job guiding at Barney's Ball Lake Lodge. I was a teenager then, but I worked there too, first as a cabin boy, and later as a guide.

Most people on the old reserve were very self-sufficient. Only the old, the sick, or the disabled got rations. The rest found work in trapping, guiding, fishing, or they went outside the reserve and found work on the railroad or in the mines. There was no such thing as what you call 'unemployment'. There was always work to do. But now on the new reserve, there is 'unemployment' and even 'unemployment insurance'.

At the time of the move to the new reserve, I was working for a mining company in Red Lake. I came back to Grassy Narrows, I think it was 1966, because we were given a new house, and I heard that there were going to be jobs on the reserve."<sup>15</sup>

The ebb and flow of people between the old reserve and "the outside", and between seasonal work off the reserve and the winter sojourn on the traplines, makes it difficult to distinguish the pattern of economic activity of those who stayed on the old reserve from those who left the reserve. Some chose to work outside the reserve in the wintertime and return to guide at the sports fishing lodges in the summertime. Based on a survey of all heads of household in 1977, we know that about 51% of all heads of household always lived on or near the old reserve.<sup>16</sup> About 20% of heads of household moved to McIntosh and found work there while their children were in residential school, and about 15%

---

<sup>15</sup> Marcel Pahpasay, November 14, 1977.

<sup>16</sup> The "survey" refers to a survey of all heads of household that I carried out during 1977 at Grassy Narrows.

moved off the reserve for periods greater than two years at any time in search of wage employment. The 1977 survey indicates the following pattern for the residence of heads of household:

<u>Place of Residence</u>	<u>Number of Heads of Household</u>
On-reserve all their life	45
In residential school: 34	
Not in residential school: 11	
Moved to McIntosh while children were in residential school	16
Moved outside the reserve for more than two years at a time for reasons of full-time employment	14
Other: In-migrant to Grassy Narrows from other reserves	11
Off-reserve for more than 2 years for reasons not related to employ- ment or schooling	<u>2</u> 88

As noted previously, the return of the Grassy Narrows families to the new reserve, induced by the promises of housing, jobs, and welfare, was received as a mixed blessing by those who remained.<sup>17</sup> The families that lived at McIntosh were singled out as being those "who learned a lot of bad things from the white people who worked on the railroads" and who brought with them a way of life acquired at McIntosh based on welfare, drinking, and violence. As Andy Keewatin described it, "it was a sense of not being with your own people anymore". Such reflections on life linked to the new reserve are frequently followed by the refrain, "If only they had left us alone...."

---

17

See pages 189-190 for a fuller exposition of this point, and for the views of Andy Keewatin.



### Guiding

Whether the Grassy Narrows people stayed on the old reserve or camped around McIntosh and other small towns, the tourist industry, particularly the sports fishing camps and lodges, came to play a significant role in their seasonal occupations. Although some Band members began guiding sports fishermen as early as the mid-1930's, the extensive involvement of the people in the sports fishery did not start until after the end of the Second World War. In the 1944-1947 period, three fishing lodges opened on the English-Wabigoon river system: Delaney Lodge, Ball Lake Lodge, and Grassy Lodge. At Delaney and Ball Lake, the Grassy Narrows people helped to clear the land and to build the log cabins. When the lodges opened, they became guides, lodge workers, and cabin girls. All the lodges in the vicinity of the reserve were essentially family-run businesses and, over time, special relationships developed between the owners and the Indian people who worked for them.<sup>18</sup> Guiding skills and knowledge passed from father to son. It was understood that work at the lodges would be shared within family groups; as each generation followed another, certain Grassy Narrows families developed exclusive associations with particular lodges. Thus guiding became an important economic activity for the Grassy Narrows people and an integral part of their way of life. It fitted well into the seasonal cycle of work by providing wage employment for five months of the year. It permitted families to live and work together and it reinforced the clannish nature of their social organization as individual families

---

18

The Latin American concept of "Patron" best describes the relationship between the lodge owners and the Indian guides and workers, whereas the idea of a "paternalistic relationship" doesn't go far enough. At Ball Lake, for example, the owners Marion and Barney Lamm provided shelter and income (for food purchases) for their Indian guides. The Indians lived with their families in small shacks near the main lodge, out of sight of the guests; they were not allowed access to the main lodge and were not permitted to mingle with the guests. There was a strict hierarchy among the workers of the camps based on race: white guides and staff came before Indian guides and staff.

carved out "territories" of influence at certain lodges. Because guiding, like hunting and trapping, is based on acquired skills and intimate knowledge of the land, social status and respect accrues to the best guides in the community.

In other respects, however, guiding introduced new elements to the culture and range of experience of the Grassy Narrows people. In the first place,

"The Grassy Narrows people...they first got used to alcohol and beer at the tourist camps. During the trapping season, they didn't drink; back on the old reserve, they used home brew, but usually only on ceremonial occasions like the naming of a child. I knew a man from Grassy who said he dreaded the tourist season because he knew that he couldn't fight liquor when he started guiding. The tourists, they would always drink heavily. I would say that the daily intake of three beers or so was a habit that the Grassy Narrows people picked up at the lodges. They got used to being able to drink every day during the summer."<sup>19</sup>

Simon Fobister traces his father's drinking habits to the same source:

"My people had a natural talent for guiding; they knew where the game fish were, and the tourist camps needed that skill. But the tourist camps brought many problems. One of the problems was alcohol. My father...was first exposed to alcohol on a daily basis while guiding. After a day of guiding [at Ball Lake Lodge], he would have three or four beers with the rest of the guides. Every weekend on Saturday night, a party would form."<sup>20</sup>

In the second place, the tourist camps exposed the Indian guides to a class of wealthy people in search of the "wilderness experience". The clientele of the tourist lodges was certainly of a different category

---

<sup>19</sup> Father Lacelle, April 3, 1979.

<sup>20</sup> Simon Fobister, excerpt from the film "Grassy Narrows - a people between..."

than the immigrants and outcasts with whom the Grassy Narrows people worked on railway section gangs around McIntosh. Of the lodges on the English-Wabigoon river system, Ball Lake Lodge was the most renown for the luxuriousness of its accommodation and the exclusivity of its clientele.<sup>21</sup> The Grassy Narrows people who worked there remember guiding for Americans of great wealth, fame, or notoriety. Andy Keewatin, one of the top guides at Ball Lake for over twenty years, describes the Ball Lake clientele as follows:

"Over the years, Ball Lake was a favourite place for Hollywood movie stars, oil millionaires from Texas, and top executives from large American companies. From May to June, we usually guided men who came to Ball Lake especially for fishing; from July to August, we had very rich American families; and from September to October, we guided single men who were there to fish and hunt. Ball Lake was a very famous place.

It was also a favourite place for the Chicago Mafia. One day, Sam Taylor arrived with two bodyguards...they would take two guides, one for themselves and one for their bodyguards. I also used to guide for Jimmy Hoffa, and for the Hollywood stars. It was very interesting to meet such famous people and to guide for them, the cream of American society. Guiding, it was a good life."<sup>22</sup>

In the third place, guiding became an important source of cash income. All the lodges hired guides and camp workers at one fixed daily rate of pay which was set at the beginning of each season. The rate of pay was consistent from camp to camp and, because the guides had no organization of their own, they could not bargain for higher wages. Wage rates increased over time; wages rose from \$4 a day in 1947 to \$12 a day

---

<sup>21</sup>

The communal areas of the main lodge at Ball Lake were really quite spectacular. The dining room, for example, was furnished with trophies of big game and fish, splendid polar bear skins, stuffed wolves and foxes, Tiffany lamps, and hand-made furniture. The Safari Room displayed magnificent zebra and leopard skins from Africa and other trophies. The entire camp, which generated its own electricity and had its own chapel, had an air of elegance and comfort about it. It was an oasis of luxury amid the wilderness.

<sup>22</sup>

Andy Keewatin, February 16, 1978.

in 1970 and to \$25 a day in 1977. Tips were often more important than wages; the best guides at Ball Lake commanded \$20 a day in tips and average guides received about \$5 a day in tips. Guiding skill and experience was not reflected in the base scale of wages as there was only one set rate of pay for all guides. The most experienced and knowledgeable guides, however, were usually assigned to the most socially-prominent or important guests. In addition, the "top guides" at any camp were not subject to layoff during slack periods or to a decrease in wages as a result of re-assignment to camp work.<sup>23</sup> At Ball Lake Lodge,

"...there were five white guides and five Indian guides in the 'top ten' of all the guides employed there. Even though people came from Manitoba and Alberta to guide at Ball Lake, all the Indian guides in the 'top ten' were from Grassy Narrows."<sup>24</sup>

Lodge-owners depended heavily on the experienced and professional guides to bring back business year after year. Much of the financial success of their operation was tied to satisfied sports fishing enthusiasts spreading the word back home. It is not without some justification therefore when Indian people from Grassy Narrows say that they helped build the clientele of Ball Lake Lodge and the fortunes of its owner, Barney Lamm. Indeed, for the first five years of Ball Lake's operation, all the guides came from Grassy Narrows.

Aside from the available pool of low-priced Indian labour, the wealth of the lodge-owners was accumulated in other ways as well.

---

23

Lodge workers and guides were usually hired by the camp-owner for the season, but they were paid only for the days actually worked. During the slack period of mid-July through August, the less experienced guides would be subject to layoff or they might be re-assigned to lodge work which involved a lower rate of pay. According to Andy Keewatin, in the late 1960's lodge workers received only \$6 a day, whereas guides were making \$10 to \$12 dollars a day. Because he was one of the ten "top guides" at Ball Lake, he continued to receive the guiding wage even when re-assigned to lodge work during slack periods.

24

Andy Keewatin, February 16, 1978.

"At the end of the summer, the people who worked in the camps never came back with any money. Barney Lamm, for example, had a real good system going for him. The Grassy Narrows families who lived at Ball Lake, they had to buy their groceries at his store. Every night, the guides would drink 3 or 4 beer, but he never gave it to them, he sold it to them. He would take it off their wages. If one of the guides wanted to use a boat and motor to come back to the reserve, sure, Barney would let him take the boat, but the guide would have to pay for it.

At the end of the season, no one came back from Ball Lake with any savings. Everything was spent at Ball Lake as soon as it was earned at Ball Lake."<sup>25</sup>

"I don't believe that the Indians always got the huge tips that the guests left for them. At Ball Lake, these tips would often be collected by Barney and then supposedly 'shared' with everybody at the end of the season. Maybe he would use some of that money to make a 'prize' for the 'best Indian guide'. That way, he kept some control over the Indians.

The Indians never knew whether they had money coming to them or not because most of the camp operators took it off them in groceries and booze."<sup>26</sup>

Yet the people at Grassy Narrows liked the way of life that guiding afforded and interest in guiding has remained high from the time that the lodges opened in the late 1940's to the present. A survey of the male heads of household in 1977 shows that almost three-quarters of the men now over 45 years of age started guiding in the late 1940's and early 1950's. Of the 28 men whose history of guiding employment is known, six have been guiding for over 35 years while the rest have been guiding for an average of 23.5 years. The majority of the Grassy Narrows people involved in the sports fishery were employed by Ball Lake Lodge, Delaney Lodge, and Grassy Lodge; some worked in smaller camps, at

---

<sup>25</sup> Norman Schantz, October, 1978.

<sup>26</sup> Stu Martin, March 8, 1980.

Big Canyon Lodge, Maynard Lake Lodge, South Shore Lodge, Red Indian Lodge, and Rocky Lake Camp. The importance of guiding in the community economy, particularly in the late 1960's, can be illustrated with reference to participation rates during the 1968 season. An examination of the records of Indian staff employed by the lodges reveals that during that year, 57 men and women from Grassy Narrows had jobs at the fishing camps; 20 men were employed as guides for the entire season; 21 men were guiding during the busy part of the season (from mid-May to the end of June); 11 men guided occasionally; and, 5 women were working as cabin girls.<sup>27</sup> Over three-quarters of all the households on the reserve had one or more members involved in the sports fishery.

Unlike every other sector of the old reserve economy, guiding was not negatively affected by the move to the new reserve. The attractiveness of guiding was actually enhanced by certain government programs that followed relocation. The most important of these, from the point of view of the guides, was unemployment insurance. Beginning in the mid-1960's, it became possible for the summer guiding period to be followed by a period of transition covered by government unemployment subsidies.

In 1970 mercury was discovered in the English-Wabigoon river system. Barney Lamm closed his Ball Lake Lodge. While this event temporarily disrupted the entire tourist industry in northwestern Ontario dedicated to sports fishing, the industry revived and employment in guiding continued as a critical component of the new reserve economy. A more complete discussion of the economic impact of mercury poisoning on Grassy Narrows, specifically the impact of the closure of Ball Lake Lodge on guiding employment, is contained in the chapter on mercury.

---

27

"Indians Employed at Tourist Camps, 1968-1970". This list of staff, by community of origin and period of time employed, was found in Band files on guiding employment.

### Commercial Fishing

Commercial fishing was the most recent sector of economic activity to be added to the seasonal pattern of the old reserve economy. Although the Grassy Narrows people had been fishing for food for centuries, they could use fish as a commodity of exchange only when air transport made it possible to get fish to the Kenora market quickly and reliably. Barney Lamm was involved in commercial air transport; he encouraged Band members to fish and was the first to haul fish to the Kenora market.<sup>28</sup> In 1957, the Grassy Narrows Band received a licence from the Ontario Department of Lands and Forests to fish for pickerel, pike, bass, whitefish, and tullibee in Indian Lake, Grassy Narrows Lake, and in the waters lying between these lakes and adjacent to the reserve. Outside of reserve waters, the licence was invalid between April 1 and September 30 in order to give priority to sports fishing. In 1960 the licence also included Lount Lake and Big Fox Lake.

From the beginning commercial fishing at Grassy Narrows was closely related to guiding. According to MNR records of the mid-1960's and the information collected from all households in the 1977 survey, twenty-three full-time guides were also commercial fishermen who fished from the end of the guiding season to freeze-up. Many guides had access to fishing equipment (boats and motors, nets) because they were sons or brothers of persons engaged in the fishery full-time. There were 14 persons who fished year-round for the maximum amount of time during the open water season; in this group, there were four women and ten men. Fishing was most often a family enterprise; John Kokopenace, the head of his clan, fished with his two sons. David Beaver, a year-round fisherman, fished with his father and his brother after they finished guiding. Alice Fisher and Mary Pahpasay looked after the nets while their husbands were guiding. Younger men were engaged in commercial

---

28

The exact year commercial fishing first started at Grassy Narrows has not been recorded. Some people say that Barney Lamm started hauling fish in 1954; others believe it was later. In any case, there was very little commercial fishing by Band members prior to the mid-1950's.

fishing as helpers. Because commercial fishing enabled people to make fairly good money in a short time, it was an important source of income during the seasonal cycle. Needless to say, as a by-product of commercial fishing and guiding activities, fish could be easily obtained for domestic consumption.

Figure II:8 graphs the available production data from the commercial fishery at Grassy Narrows over a thirteen year period. Based on MNR records, these data are subject to similar problems of under-reporting as have been observed with reference to trapping. The Band's fishing licence called for a collective reporting responsibility to MNR's district office in Kenora; yet, each fisherman could only report his catch on an individual basis. Thus, the aggregate record for the Band as a whole could only be as good as the sum of individual reports. The observable variations in catch from year to year thus could be either a function of incomplete reporting or a function of other factors such as the availability of alternative sources of employment and income. It is probable that the MNR data underestimate the actual fish catch but it is not known by how much. The data do not include fish retained for domestic consumption.

Over the 1957-1969 period, the total harvest of all species of fish by commercial fishermen at Grassy Narrows was 465,055 pounds. The three most economically important species were whitefish, northern pike, and pickerel (walleye); they constituted 91% of this total, or 421,366 pounds. All other species made up the remainder or 9%.<sup>29</sup> Of the total amount of fish harvested during this period, the proportion represented by whitefish was 43%, by walleye 26%, and by northern pike 22%.

---

29

All other species include: chubs, tullibees, ciscoes, ling, mooneye, suckers, perch, bullhead, rock bass, lake trout, saugers, and goldeye.



Detailed production figures are shown below.<sup>30</sup> The average annual catch of all species from the commercial fishery at Grassy Narrows over the 13-year period was 35,774 pounds.

Trends in the production of the three most commercially valuable species of fish are observable in Figure II:8. The data lend some support to the observation by Norman Schantz, the Mennonite missionary at Grassy Narrows, that commercial fishing dropped substantially after the move the new reserve.

---

<sup>30</sup>

Production Data From the Commercial Fishery at Grassy Narrows: 1957-1969

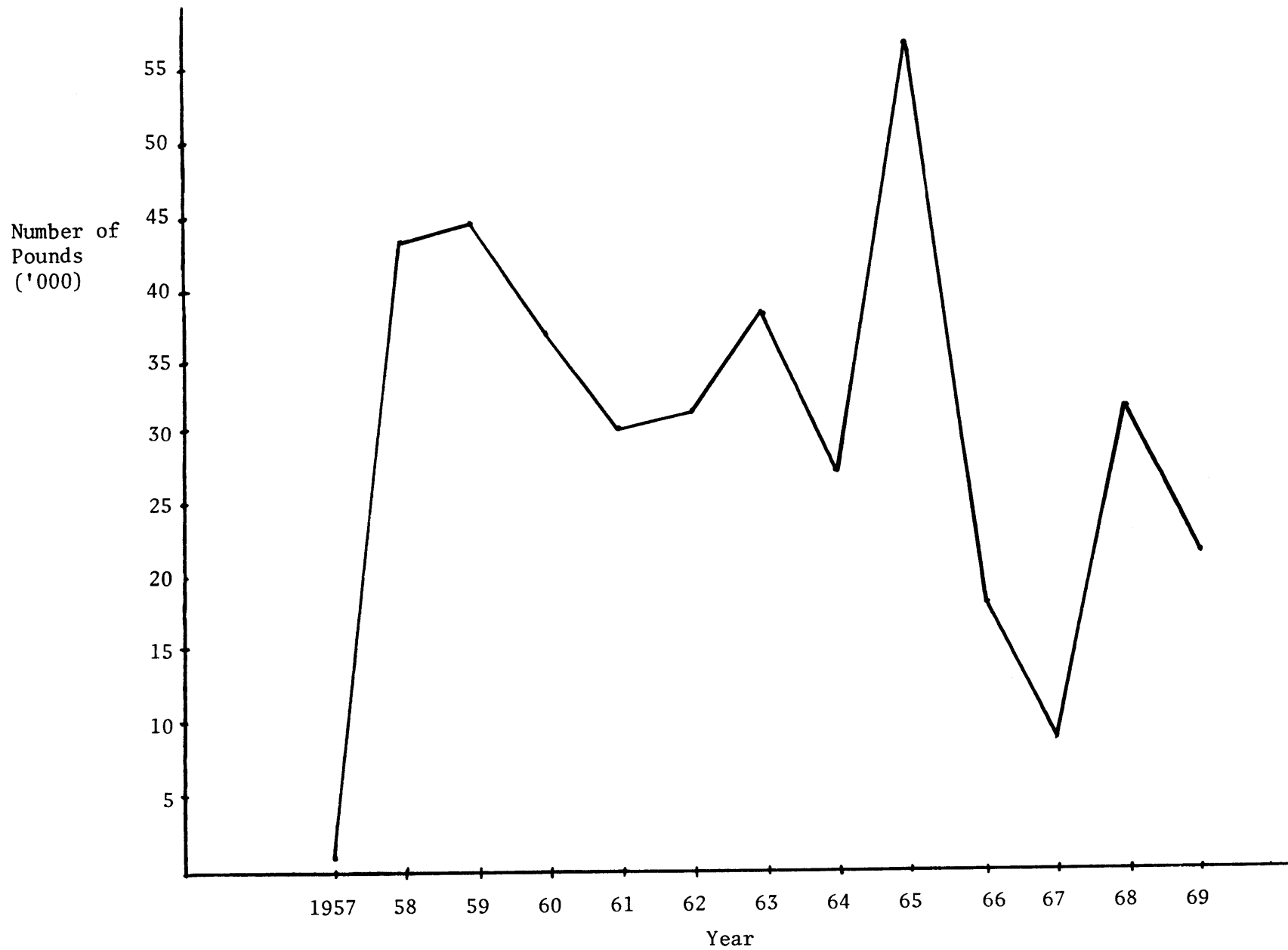
<u>Year</u>	<u>Whitefish</u>	<u>Walleye</u>	<u>Northern Pike</u>
1957	1,286 lbs.	702 lbs.	1,534 lbs.
1958	22,168	12,877	10,689
1959	31,380	8,700	6,739
1960	23,734	7,827	7,701
1961	17,023	8,846	6,319
1962	15,121	9,661	8,026
1963	12,032	16,380	12,148
1964	10,266	10,301	9,195
1965	17,232	20,373	21,447
1966	9,286	6,962	4,539
1967	6,177	3,400	2,873
1968	16,816	10,546	6,966
1969	<u>17,447</u>	<u>3,663</u>	<u>2,984</u>
Total Catch	199,968	120,238	101,160
% of Total, All Species	43%	26%	22%

The production figures of whitefish, walleye, and northern pike for each year have been added in order to arrive at a combined catch total. The total catch for these three species is then presented, in graphic form, in Figure II:8.

Data Source: Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR)

Figure II:8

COMMERCIAL FISH CATCH AT GRASSY NARROWS: 1957-1969\*



\* Includes only the commercially valued species of whitefish, walleye, and northern pike  
Data Source: Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources

The data indicate a sharp decline in 1966-67 of the level of production of whitefish, walleye, and pike. Compared to an average annual catch of 40,773 pounds in the 1958-1965 period, the average annual catch in the late 1960's (1966-1969) was only 22,914 pounds. This represents a drop of almost 50% from the average harvest of the earlier period. It is not likely that such a drop can be attributed solely to difficulties in the reporting of the catch. A more persuasive explanation of the downward trend in fish production following the relocation is one that also helps explain the decline in other land-based economic activities like trapping, namely, the availability of other economic options which promised an equal or higher return for less effort. Indeed a closer examination of data on government expenditures in the late 1960's, particularly with reference to employment training programs (Table II:1 in the following pages), shows not only extraordinary levels of government spending on the new reserve, but also high participation rates on the part of the Grassy Narrows labour force in alternative ways of making a living.

In 1970 the discovery of mercury in the river system was followed by a ban on all commercial fishing operations. Because commercial fishing was one of the few economic activities left on the new reserve that permitted families to work together, the ban hit hardest those traditional families, like the Kokopenaces, who struggled to maintain this cherished aspect of the old way of life. There were only a handful of families left by the end of the decade of the 1960's where the sons worked with the fathers, and husbands and wives worked side by side; these few families, however, tried to resist the pressures to change in ways that would ultimately erode their self-sufficiency and tear apart the bonds of family life.

This completes our discussion of the component sectors of the old reserve economy and the changes in each sector that followed in the wake of the relocation. We now move to the second part of this chapter, namely, to an analysis of the economy of the new reserve. The crucial shift from the self-sufficiency of the old way of life to the economy of dependence on government funding is documented as follows: on the one hand, we look at government policy in action by examining government spending on the reserve; on the other hand, we look at the structure of the new reserve economy by analyzing the sources of household income.

The New Reserve Economy:  
Government Intervention and Structural Change

The most comprehensive record of the extent of government involvement with the Grassy Narrows Band in the years immediately following relocation comes not from the Department of Indian Affairs but from the Department of Manpower and Immigration. In line with the emphasis given in government policy to the provision of the same services to Indians available to other Canadians, the Department of Manpower began in 1966 a massive effort to promote its training courses on Indian reserves. From no involvement at all in the affairs of the Band on the old reserve, the Department's spending at Grassy Narrows jumped to an average of \$88,000 in three years following the move to the new reserve. In the 1966-1968 period, an annual average of 41 Grassy Narrows Band members, predominantly male, representing almost two-thirds of the male labour force resident on the reserve, were paid a weekly allowance of \$60-\$80 to attend Manpower-sponsored training courses. As an economic option providing steady dependable income, the best course was the Basic Training for Skill Development (BTSD) course; it offered 24 weeks (6 months) of "seasonal" employment at a good wage in return for classroom instruction in the upgrading of math, science, and English language skills. For many heads of household attendance at Manpower courses not only constituted a stable and certain source of income, but also represented a form of employment that was accorded higher status than "being on welfare". Courses were perceived as special variants of the habit of "going to work every day", and sometimes the same people returned to Manpower courses year after year. Participation in courses thus became entrenched as part of the "new" way of life. The extent of participation, the length of the courses, and the level of government expenditure on courses over time are presented in Table II:1.

Table II:1

MANPOWER COURSES HELD ON THE GRASSY NARROWS RESERVE

1966-1972 and 1975-1977

<u>Year</u>	<u>Course Title</u>	<u>Number Enrolled</u>	<u>No. Weeks in Course</u>	<u>Cost of Program</u> \$	<u>Total Expenditure</u> \$
1966	English language & skill training	40	3 courses @ 16 wks.	73,500	73,500
1967	BTSD*	38	24	103,410	
	Guiding course	6	12	8,280	111,690
1968	BTSD	27	24	71,928	
	Driver training	10	3	3,450	
	Orientation to work	1	20	3,300	78,678
1969	BTSD	16	24	44,160	
	Band administration	2	12	3,840	48,000
1970	BTSD	8	24	14,960	
	Heavy equipment operation	1	40	386	
	Band administration	2	12	3,840	19,186
1971	BTSD	17	24	46,920	
	Construction	14	20	35,000	
	Prospecting	1	9	1,116	
	Bookkeeping	1	40	6,600	
	Band administration	1	20	1,920	
	Small motor repairs	1	4	656	92,212
1972	BTSD	17	24	46,920	
	Orientation to work	1	6	1,040	47,960
1973- 1974	Statistics missing				
1975	BTSD	16	20	41,120	
	Commerce refresher	2	16	5,120	46,240
1976	BTSD	15	24	50,400	
	Community Improver	9	12	18,630	
	Commercial fishing	1	4	848	69,878
1977	BTSD	15	24	50,400	
	Nursery aide	4	16	11,880	62,280

\*

Basic Training for Skill Development (BTSD)

Data Source: Canada Manpower Centre, Kenora, Ontario.

With the exception of 1973 and 1974, years for which statistics are missing, the Department of Manpower spent an average of \$65,000 a year over the 1966-1977 period on the Grassy Narrows reserve. Since almost the entire amount of spending could be accounted for by training allowances to course participants, the level of expenditure in any one year had a direct and immediate effect on household incomes. Although expenditures sometimes fluctuated wildly, from a high of \$111,690 in 1967 to a low of \$19,186 in 1970, their impact on the small community was substantial. It was perhaps not accidental that the highest level of spending occurred in the years just following relocation when the federal government felt it was necessary to provide incentives for Indians to give up winter trapping and settle into a sedentary pattern of year-round residence on the reserve. Indeed, from average annual spending of \$88,000 in 1966-1968, the level of expenditure dropped to an average annual figure of \$53,000 in 1969-1971, and \$59,000 in 1975-1977.

An analysis of the male/female composition of course participants suggests that the courses provided economic opportunity primarily for male heads of household. Of the total of 247 Band members that attended Manpower courses over a 9-year period, 88% were men. It is not surprising that courses were more economically attractive options than the traditional occupations they displaced. The training allowances were subject neither to uncertainties of supply (of fur-bearing animals, for example), nor to unforeseen fluctuations in price; they did not depend on skill, fortune, or effort. At Grassy Narrows and elsewhere the availability of these new forms of government-sponsored "employment" created a unique set of circumstances and a fundamental change in the economic order. Paul Driben makes the following observation on the impact of manpower programs on the Fort Hope reserve:

"From a political standpoint the implementation of these programs and services may have been intended to ensure the band that they could receive the same government services that other Canadians were already receiving. But when government agencies

started to pay the Indians for participating in their programs, and administering them at the local level, they produced a totally unexpected result. Within only a few years, they had actually strengthened their position as the most important economic resource in the band's environment...

[At Fort Hope]...traditional activities like fishing have suffered. Once a key element in the band's economy, fishing now provides only part-time or week-end work for an ever growing majority. In short, the government had made a critical error...The programs had not only failed to free the Indians from economic dependency, they had made them more dependent on government support than at any other time in their history."<sup>31</sup>

The phenomenon of ever increasing dependency on government to provide livelihood on the new reserve is also starkly manifest in the available statistics on expenditures on the Grassy Narrows reserve by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND). Very little information on the total amount of spending is available prior to the 1969-1970 fiscal year. An exhaustive perusal of all old files pertaining to Grassy Narrows produced only a set of vouchers for the payment of wages and materials related to the construction of houses and community facilities on the new reserve during the 1963-1965 period and for the year 1967.<sup>32</sup> These statistics do not give a complete picture of the financial contribution made by DIAND to the economy of transition between the old and the new reserves. They simply confirm the memory of the Grassy Narrows people that in the mid-1960's DIAND made available to

---

<sup>31</sup> Driben and Trudeau, The Fort Hope Experience, pp. 100, 102.

<sup>32</sup> I am indebted to Harry Veldstra, the district planner in the Kenora office of DIAND, for his painstaking review of Grassy Narrows files for the 1960's. He compiled a list of 125 vouchers which appeared to be the only record of DIAND spending on the reserve during this period. The total amounts spent on labour and materials in construction on the new reserve that are documented in these vouchers are as follows:

1963: \$6,568.71	1964: \$15,706.23	1965: \$18,910.82
1967: \$72,991.93		

Band members a number of jobs in housing construction on the new reserve.<sup>33</sup>

Much better records of total DIAND expenditure on the Grassy Narrows reserve exist for the 1970's. A summary statement of total spending on this reserve was prepared by the Kenora office for the period 1969-70 to 1977-78.<sup>34</sup> However, the erratic movement of the level of spending from year to year indicated that perhaps these data should be re-examined and compared to comprehensive and detailed statements of income and expenditure at the Band level. When this was done it was discovered that for fiscal year 1973-74 and beyond the financial data provided by the Kenora district office deviated markedly in some years from expenditures documented in audited financial statements.<sup>35</sup>

In the following table, the expenditures for the period 1969-70 to 1972-73 are based on information provided by the Kenora district office; the figures for 1973-74 and later, however, are based on actual financial statements.

---

<sup>33</sup> Of the total amount spent on construction over four years (excluding 1966 for which statistics are missing), approximately \$43,500.00 or 38% of the total was spent on wages.

<sup>34</sup> These financial data are contained in a letter dated November 17, 1977, from B.A. Miller, Local Government Adviser, to B. Bennett, Acting District Manager of the Kenora office.

<sup>35</sup> The information provided by the Kenora district office for fiscal year 1973-74 and beyond was as follows:

1973-1974	\$413,300
1974-1975	377,600
1975-1976	289,600
1976-1977	408,600
1977-1978	950,900

Whereas social assistance payments are included in three of the above years, they are mysteriously excluded for 1975-1976 and 1976-1977. This inconsistency probably accounts for the difference between the two sets of data.



Table II:2

TOTAL EXPENDITURES BY THE DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS  
ON THE GRASSY NARROWS RESERVE: 1969-1977

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Percent</u> <u>Annual Increase</u>
		%
1969-1970	\$ 37,600	
1970-1971	106,400	183
1971-1972	143,100	35
1972-1973	356,800	149
1973-1974	386,600	12
1974-1975	370,820	- 4
1975-1976	442,135	19
1976-1977	708,970	60
1977-1978	900,000	27

The substantial increase in DIAND expenditures at Grassy Narrows over time is eloquent testimony to the steady expansion of the government's presence in, and influence over, Band affairs. The data raise two questions: first, what factors singly or in combination account for the sharp increase in spending? Second, what proportion of total government expenditures translates into disposable income for Band members? The history of the payment of social assistance (welfare) on the Grassy Narrows reserve provides a partial answer to both questions.

In accordance with national policy directives to extend to Indians the benefits already enjoyed by the non-Indian population, on April 1, 1965, DIAND adopted for its social assistance program the same scales of payment, eligibility conditions, and types of services as were applicable to all citizens under existing provincial programs. In doing so, the Department not only departed from the customary payment of welfare in the form of vouchers or goods but also committed itself to much higher rates of payment of welfare in cash and a greater diversity in the kinds of

social services to be extended to Indian people.<sup>36</sup>

The pattern of expenditures on social assistance in the specific instance of Grassy Narrows reflects the policy and legislative changes at the national level. The available statistical documentation, however, suffers from the same problem of variability according to data source as that observed in the documentation of total DIAND expenditures at Grassy Narrows. The information provided by the Kenora district office on social assistance systematically underestimates these expenditures for fiscal year 1973-74 and beyond in comparison to both the statistics obtained directly from the provincial Ministry of Community and Social Services (COMSOC) and the actual expenditures recorded in the Band's own annual financial statements.<sup>37</sup>

---

36

The situation in the province of Ontario prior to 1965 was as follows: Indian Bands could participate under the Ontario General Welfare Assistance Act if they were willing/able to pay 20% of total costs. Only one Band (Six Nations) was able to do so. The other Bands received welfare in the form of rations/vouchers from DIAND. In December 1965, the General Welfare Agreement was signed between the federal government and the Province of Ontario which provided for the extension of provincial welfare services to all Bands in Ontario. These services included not only general assistance, but also a foster child care allowance, special assistance for travel or funerals, supplementary aid for shelter, special allowances for advanced age, and so on. Under provincial regulations, criteria, and rates of pay, the total amounts that DIAND had to reimburse the Province for delivery of these services had to be considerably higher than the token amounts spent on Indian welfare services prior to 1965.

37

The three sources of information for the history of social assistance payments at Grassy Narrows are as follows:

(1) Kenora District: "Social Assistance Payments (Grassy Narrows - Islington)", contained in a letter dated November 21, 1979 from P.C. Mackie, the Assistant Deputy Minister of DIAND, to Mr. E.B. Joliffe, Mediator.

(2) Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services (COMSOC): Statistics on total social assistance expenditures, by month, category of assistance, category of recipient, and year. Available only for 1974-75 to 1977-78.

(3) Financial Statements of Income and Expenditure for the Grassy Narrows Band: Years 1973-74 to 1977-78. These statements are broken down by category and item of expenditure.

The COMSOC financial data fall mid-way between the figures supplied by the Kenora district and the figures shown in the Band's financial statements. It is very likely that the category of "social assistance" in the latter source contains expenditures for social services other than "general welfare". The data generated by all three sources are given in a footnote to Table II:3.

In Table II:3, which documents total expenditures on social assistance payments to the Band over time, the figures for the period before 1973-74 are taken from the Kenora District Office; the figures after 1973-74 are based on COMSOC data.

The data on the payment of social assistance at Grassy Narrows clearly indicate the close relationship between the ever-increasing welfare costs and the rising tide in the levels of spending by the Department of Indian Affairs.<sup>38</sup> In the first half of the 1970's, welfare payments represented over a third of the total amount of money channeled into the reserve every year. The Department's reaction to the discovery of mercury in 1970 and the ban on commercial fishing was to use welfare to provide immediate relief to affected families. According to the Grassy Narrows people, however, welfare was given out indiscriminately without any appreciation of the effect of such large cash subsidies on community life. For government officials, on the other hand, welfare was easy to administer, required no new initiatives in program design, involved no changes in policy, and was unlimited in terms of a ceiling on expenditures. In spite of repeated requests early in the decade to the federal and provincial governments by the Band Council to provide employment programs on the reserve as an alternative to welfare, social assistance continued to be a predominant source of disposable income until 1976.

In 1975, a special coordinator was appointed in the Kenora District Office of DIAND to encourage and provide funding for "Band Work Programs" on the two mercury-affected reserves of Islington (Whitedog) and Grassy Narrows. In 1976-1977 DIAND spent almost a quarter of a million dollars on "Work Opportunity Programs" at Grassy Narrows (26% of the total budget). Welfare costs as a proportion of total expenditures declined to only 17% or half of their former level. The trend in the contemporary setting of fiscal priorities by Band Council and DIAND district officials favours the allocation of greater amounts of money to job creation programs

---

38

COMSOC supervises the delivery of social services to Indian reserves in Ontario. The Department of Indian Affairs, however, reimburses the Ontario government for about 95% of the costs of social assistance.

Table II:3

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE PAYMENTS TO THE GRASSY NARROWS BAND  
1961-1964 and 1968-1977

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Percent of Total DIAND Expenditures</u> %
1961-1962	\$ 6,204	
1962-1963	5,155	
1963-1964	5,487	Info. not available
1964-1965	5,690	
1965-1968	missing stats.	
1968-1969	\$ 25,149	
1969-1970	34,171	
1970-1971	90,656	81%
1971-1972	81,794	54%
1972-1973	85,263	23%
1973-1974*	\$132,455	33%
1974-1975	128,475	33%
1975-1976	140,738	30%
1976-1977	124,949	17%

\*

The variability in these data according to source is illustrated by the following figures for 1973-1974 and beyond. Below are the data given by the Kenora district office and the Band's financial statements:

	<u>Kenora Office</u>	<u>Financial Statements</u>
1973-1974	\$111,394	\$144,555
1974-1975	84,562	140,157
1975-1976	126,912	142,119
1976-1977	123,460	151,157

Data Source: Kenora district office of DIAND, for data to 1972-1973;  
COMSOC, for data since 1973-1974.

rather than to welfare.<sup>39</sup> Whatever the balance that eventually emerges between these two major items of expenditure, there is no longer any doubt that the Department of Indian Affairs has become the community's most critical economic resource. The economy that has emerged under the conditions of the new reserve is one where the great majority of the adult population is directly and immediately affected by any significant change in the amount of money made available by DIAND for various forms of subsidy and income support.

One of the consequences of the extension of additional programs to the new reserve in the 1970's has been the creation of a bureaucracy at the Band level. Until 1970 the Band's administration consisted only of the Chief, his Council, and one band administrator. By 1976, in addition to these original members, the Band's administration included a social councillor, a welfare administrator, an economic development worker, a projects' coordinator, an outreach worker, a construction supervisor, a recreation director, a truant officer, a mercury worker, and two projects' bookkeepers. Administrative costs mushroomed as more and more people were hired as "Band office staff". From an amount of \$27,540 in 1973-74, representing 7% of total DIAND expenditure, administrative salaries rose to \$90,480 in 1976-77, or 14% of the total amount of money DIAND spent on the Grassy Narrows reserve. The development of this "new class" of relatively privileged "bureaucrats" has added greatly to the tensions of transition to the new economic order because the people "at the Band office" are perceived by the rest of the community to be essentially non-productive.<sup>40</sup>

---

39

In many instances, these job creation programs are "make-work" projects, for example, clearing bush, building walkways, tending the community garden, constructing a skating rink. Irrespective of the intrinsic value of the work involved, the Band Council prefers any kind of work program or construction project to welfare. The trend towards funding these kinds of efforts is apparent from an examination of the financial statements. In 1974-1975, employment projects constituted only 7% of the total expenditures on the Grassy Narrows reserve; in 1975-76, they had risen to 21%, and in 1976-77, to 26%.

40

A discussion of this problem is also contained in chapter 6, "Transformation in Community Life and Political Order". The Band office jobs are the cream of the on-reserve job market. Unlike "make-work" project jobs, they are stable, long-term, and often high-wage jobs.

One other aspect of the new reserve economy created by government funding is of importance. According to the best intentions of DIAND officials in launching "economic development programs" on Indian reserves, these programs ostensibly were to operate within all aspects of the society, upgrading it as a whole. At Grassy Narrows, however, in little over a decade these programs resulted in an unprecedented level of social stratification and inequality both in earning opportunity and in the distribution of essential goods and services. People became fully dependent on government funding for their jobs and their income; in a very real way, however, they also became dependent on the people at the Band office who decided who should get work, for how long, and at what rate of pay. The most basic decisions about employment, welfare, or housing thus became subject to political maneuvering. Those families not represented in the bureaucratic "elite" at the Band office by a close relative would be at a disadvantage; at the same time, they would have great difficulty providing for their basic needs using traditional resources or means. Caught between the old and the new way of life, such families became almost totally dependent upon the statutory provision of social assistance. These families came to constitute the "underclass" of Grassy Narrows society.<sup>41</sup>

---

41

It is not perhaps coincidental that families belonging to this "underclass" are all hard-core, very heavy drinking families on the reserve. A similar finding has been made with respect to the Inupiat people in Barrow, on the Alaskan North Slope. A study on alcoholism in the Alaskan native population concluded that alcohol use was intimately related to the social and economic changes brought about in that society by energy development activities. The findings are relevant to the Grassy Narrows situation. The authors of the Barrow study conclude:

"Drinking is a way of dealing with stress. A main source of stress for people derives from Barrow's changing social organization as a traditional Inupiat society gives way to a bureaucratized 'urban' society. Relatively permanent and fixed social differences appear in a society that was nearly unstratified....A new elite class coming into power consists of individuals able to manage Barrow's new bureaucratic organizations. The new stratification is, basically, political....The emerging conflicts of social stratification, resulting from increasing cash and bureaucratic power being concentrated in the hands of a few, have resulted in social stresses for the many which are associated with the drinking."

Samuel Z. Klausner, Edward F. Foulks, and Mark H. Moore, The Inupiat, Economics and Alcohol on the Alaskan North Slope, (Philadelphia: Center for Research on the Acts of Man, 1979), pp. 28-29, 40.

At this point, it is necessary to clarify the idea that the changes in the mode of livelihood of the Grassy Narrows people were somehow a unique product of their special circumstances with respect to relocation and mercury. While one can argue that the Grassy Narrows reserve was relocated in order to make it easier for DIAND to deliver new programs and services,<sup>42</sup> it should be noted that many Indian Bands that had not been relocated also experienced similar transformations in their economic life, especially during the decade of the 1970's. The relatively recent concern for Indian economic development can be traced to The White Paper of 1969, which enshrined Prime Minister Trudeau's notions of "The Just Society" and articulated a commitment to a national Indian policy that would "lead to the full, free, and non-discriminatory participation of the Indian people in Canadian society."<sup>43</sup> Although the White Paper was hastily withdrawn as a result of strong Indian protest, the Government of Canada subsequently made three important changes in Indian policy: first,

---

42

For the circumstances and conditions surrounding the decision to relocate the Grassy Narrows reserve, see pp. 287-294.

43

Government of Canada, Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy, 1969, p. 5.

The White Paper had as its ideological framework the notion that true equality for Indian people could only be achieved through removing the constitutional and legislative bases of discrimination. Towards this end, it proposed that the services to Indians should come through the same channels and from the same government agencies that service all Canadians. This line of reasoning led to some fairly radical proposals for policy change: first, the White Paper suggested that the Indian Act be repealed, so that Indians could control lands and hold title to them. Second, it argued that the provinces should take over the same responsibilities for Indians as they have for all citizens in the province. Third, it advised the "withering away" of DIAND. And fourth, it promoted substantial funds for Indian economic development.

The Indian leaders across Canada objected to the White Paper in the strongest possible terms over what they saw as an ill-concealed attempt to take away their special status. They also saw in the transfer of responsibilities to the province, an abrogation of treaty obligations by the federal government. In the elimination of DIAND, they believed that they would be overwhelmed by the maze of the federal bureaucracy, with no agency especially responsible for their problems. Finally, they objected to the White Paper on the grounds that it had been written and released without any prior consultation with Indian people.

a commissioner was appointed to settle land claims; second, new funds were made available for Indian economic development; and third, instructions were issued to a number of government departments to provide their services to Indian people for the first time. The consequences of this national policy on the Fort Hope Indian Band have been described by Paul Driben. He notes that the new economic development programs produced a new social and economic order on Indian reserves all across Canada:

"By supplying new funds for economic development and introducing new programs and services, they [the Government of Canada] were creating a new environment, much like DIA [the Department of Indian Affairs] did when they built schools. Ostensibly, this new environment was supposed to promote the cultural and economic independence of the Indians, but for the people in the Fort Hope band, the results would be the opposite. They would become the dumping ground for White Paper programs, and in only a few years find themselves even more dependent on government support than they were in 1969."<sup>44</sup>

In the 1970's, the Department of Indian Affairs began to supply Indian Bands across the country with large amounts of money for job-creation: programs were delivered under such titles as Work Opportunities Projects (WOP) and Federal Labour Intensive Projects (FLIP). The material provisioning of many reserve communities, including Grassy Narrows, now depends almost entirely on government funds. In more isolated northern communities, it is not unusual to find that at least half of all the income earned on the reserve comes directly from federal government sources.<sup>45</sup>

Insofar as other Indian communities have also adapted the structure of their economies to take advantage of government programs, the experience of Grassy Narrows is hardly unique. While the transformation

---

<sup>44</sup>

Driben and Trudeau, The Fort Hope Experience, p. 92-93.

<sup>45</sup>

At Fort Alexander, for example, 51% of all income earned on reserve is accounted for by Band salaries and wages and DIAND sponsored economic development. At Fort Hope, economic development programs alone account for 43% of the Band's total disposable income. Lithman, The Community Apart, p. 157, and Driben, op. cit., p. 114.



might not have occurred at such a rapid rate without the accessibility to the reserve that relocation achieved, it is doubtful that Grassy Narrows could have escaped entirely the great push forward to "liberate" Indian communities from dependency and also "to lead them to the full...participation in Canadian society". In one important respect, however, all the pressures towards upgrading the community through physical improvements and economic development programs were intensified at Grassy Narrows as a result of the publicity surrounding the mercury issue. A fuller discussion of governmental responses to the mercury issue can be found in the chapter on mercury pollution.

In our analysis of the transformation in the livelihood of the Grassy Narrows people after the move to the new reserve, we have examined so far only one side of the coin. We have looked at the pattern of government spending on the reserve over time in order to understand how the sweeping changes in national Indian policy affected the ways in which Grassy Narrows Band members made a living and related to the larger social and economic order of their community. On the basis of the data presented, we have noted that in just fifteen years, the Department of Indian Affairs alone made a quantum jump in the extent of its intervention in people's livelihood: from the elementary provision of rations to the needy on the old reserve, DIAND is today the community's most important employer and main economic resource at almost one million dollars a year. The "benefits" of such massive government intervention in the economy would have to be placed alongside the concentration of power in the hands of a few, ever-widening inequalities of opportunity, and greatly increased social stratification. If a dependency on continued government support has now been created, it is because the very magnitude of government subsidies for welfare, training, or make-work have eliminated any incentive to look for employment off the reserve and have undermined severely the economic rationale to pursue traditional occupations.

The other side of the coin in the analysis of change in the economic life of the Grassy Narrows people after the move to the new reserve involves the examination of the sources of household income.

This approach is useful in the description of the foundations upon which the economy of the new reserve rests. It is clear that, in a very short period of time, the Grassy Narrows people have experienced a transition from an economy based on the production of commodities for trade to an economy based on wage labour and the exploitation of government subsidies. It is also clear that the people have moved from a position of relative self-sufficiency in providing for their basic needs of food and shelter to a position of almost complete dependency on store-bought food and government-provided housing. The full measure of such a transformation can be documented by a careful study of how individual households now provide for their material needs.

The information that is presented in the following tables originates from a survey of 88 households on the Grassy Narrows reserve during 1977. This number represents 95% of the total number of households on the reserve (93) during that year. The data obtained from a questionnaire that probed patterns of employment, household incomes and expenditures, were cross-checked and validated by an exhaustive and separate study of Band and government documents. The following sources provided exact and reliable information on payments made to individuals, aggregated to the unit of the household: the payroll for Band office employees; the payrolls for all Band work programs and all construction projects; the paylists for welfare and family benefit programs; computerized printouts of unemployment insurance payments; and, the paylists of training allowances and other honoraria. Information was also sought from the manager of the Hudson's Bay Company, who cashed almost all government cheques, on the amounts of payment coming to individual households from such diverse sources as the old age pension, disability allowance, and family allowance. The result of this study is as accurate and verifiable a statistical portrait of the level and distribution of household incomes as the evidence would permit. Because of the rigorous criteria applied to the calculation of household income, however, money recorded as having been received by the Band for certain income supplement programs, but not recorded as having been received by a certain individual, was not included as household income. Thus the

margin of error is on the side of underestimating the total level of household income.<sup>46</sup>

Table II:4 gets to the heart of the matter with respect to the fundamental configuration of the economy of the new reserve. It presents strong confirmation of the extraordinary level of dependency of the people of Grassy Narrows on government funds. Of the total of \$962,446.00 that flowed into the community as income to households in 1977, \$789,192 or 82% came directly from government sources. Government paid for all the income originating in transfer payments, of course; government was also responsible for 71.4% of the total income earned on the reserve from all economic activities. Table II:5 details the distribution of earned vs. non-earned income on reserve in 1977.

In the light of the government's dominant role in the community economy over the last decade, it is not surprising that the people of Grassy Narrows have developed boundless expectations that this new way of life will continue indefinitely. Having been displaced from their former occupations by the relocation and by mercury pollution, many people feel that the government owes them a living and that it is the responsibility of the Band Council to negotiate ever greater amounts of money for job creation. On the old reserve a question like "who is responsible for getting people jobs" would have been greeted with incomprehension since rooted deep in the culture and experience of the people was the unspoken

---

46

In 1977, for example, there was a difference of \$16,916 between the total amount of welfare absorbed by the Grassy Narrows Band (as recorded in DIAND files) and the total amount of welfare actually received by individuals (as calculated from actual paylists). In the calculation of household incomes by source, I decided to use only the information that could be validated by paylists, vouchers, cheque requisitions, and so on. Thus, the figure for the total welfare component is probably an underestimate of the true amount. Further, because of the difficulty in obtaining unemployment insurance data due to the requirement of feeding individual social security numbers into a central computer, the total amount of unemployment insurance payments received by households has been underestimated. For the purpose of this study, people who regularly ate together were considered to constitute a household.

rule that the family was responsible for the material and non-material well-being of its members. In contrast, 90% of all the heads of households who replied to this question in the 1977 survey stated that the Chief and Council is responsible for full employment on the reserve.<sup>47</sup> The political leadership of the community has been placed in an untenable position of carrying the burden of the expectations and the weight of the responsibility without any corresponding resources to provide full employment. In fact, aside from the statutory provision of transfer payments, the government can withdraw or substantially decrease its funding of band work programs at any time for reasons of "fiscal restraint" without prior consultation with the Band Council.

The possible withdrawal of government support would pose grave difficulties for Grassy Narrows. Almost three-quarters (71%) of the community's population is under the age of 24. This group has neither the knowledge of the bush nor the skills and experience that would enable it to survive independently of government support. Furthermore, its expectations of "the good life" revolve around stable white-collar jobs, cars, frequent trips to town, colour TV and stereo equipment.<sup>48</sup> Although some older people at Grassy Narrows recognize the dangers inherent in their present state of dependency on government funding, they can conceive of no alternative to the present system because of the extent of the rupture with the old way of life.

---

47

The exact distribution of responses to the question "who is responsible for getting people jobs?" was as follows:

	<u>No. Households</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Chief and Band Council	80	90%
Department of Indian Affairs	6	7%
Individuals themselves	<u>3</u>	<u>3%</u>
	88	100%

It was understood that the Chief and Council would carry out this responsibility with money provided by government.

48

According to the survey results on the question of employment expectations and job preferences, the young generation (age 20-25) believe that the "best work" is, for example, working at the Band office, managing a small business, or going to school. Persons in this age group, with rare exceptions, have no desire to work in the bush, and no trapping or hunting skills. In contrast, the older generation (age 45 and above) think that work in the bush is by far superior to any other kind of work. The middle generation straddles both worlds but prefers government-sponsored jobs which are steady and offer a decent wage.

Table II:4

ANALYSIS OF THE SOURCES OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME AT GRASSY NARROWS: 1977

<u>EARNED INCOME</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Percent of Earned Income</u>
Government-sponsored programs:		
This includes all wage payments for Band office staff, Band work programs, subsidized Band enter- prises, and construction projects	\$431,615	71.4%
Non-government sources:		
Income from summer guiding	\$ 88,935	14.7%
Income from trapping	21,290	3.5%
Income from wild rice	38,743	6.4%
Income from private sector (contractors, The Bay Co.)	19,726	3.3%
Private donations for Band programs: wage component	<u>4,560</u>	<u>0.7%</u>
<u>Total Earned Income on Reserve:</u>	\$604,869	100.0%
 <u>NON-EARNED INCOME</u>		
Transfer payments from the Govern- ments of Canada and Ontario, all programs:	\$357,577	
<u>TOTAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME ON RESERVE</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Percent of Total Income</u>
Total Earned and Non-Earned Income	\$962,446	
<u>Government Share: Includes all non-earned income and 71.4% (\$431,615) of earned income</u>	\$789,192	82.0%

Table II:5

ANALYSIS OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME BY SOURCE: EARNED VS. NON-EARNED INCOME

<u>EARNED INCOME BY SOURCE</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>
Income from wages: all sources	\$418,000	43.4%
Income from upgrading and other training allowances, hono- raria and other payments	37,901	3.9%
Income from trapping	21,290	2.3%
Income from guiding	88,935	9.2%
Income from harvest of wild rice	<u>38,743</u>	<u>4.0%</u>
<u>Total Earned Income</u>	\$604,869	62.8%
 <u>NON-EARNED INCOME: INCOME FROM TRANSFER PAYMENTS</u>		
Welfare and foster child allowances*	\$ 93,619	9.8%
Family allowances	72,024	7.5%
Old age pensions	70,557	7.3%
Family benefits (provincial)	51,036	5.3%
Unemployment insurance*	50,421	5.2%
Disability allowances	<u>19,920</u>	<u>2.1%</u>
<u>Total Non-Earned Income</u>	\$357,577	37.2%
 <u>EARNED AND NON-EARNED INCOME: 1977</u>	 \$962,446	 100.0%

\*The figures given above for welfare and unemployment insurance are considered to underestimate the true amount, but it is not known by how much.

Welfare payments constitute about 27% of the total amount of transfer payments that flow into Grassy Narrows; disability and old age pensions make up about 25%; family allowances and family benefits contribute 34% to the total.

The answers of the heads of household to the question of whether this dependency is "good for the community" illustrate community perspectives on this issue:<sup>49</sup>

<u>Response</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
People at Grassy Narrows can't be 'independent' anymore...The old way of life began to disappear when the government came in to force our children to go to the reserve school, when we were forced to move from the old reserve. Today, we need the jobs. We need money from the government to survive.	44	50%
It is not good for the community to be so reliant on government...People lose pride when they cannot provide for themselves by trapping, hunting, or fishing. But, we cannot fish because of mercury; we can't hunt like we used to because there are fewer animals...We really can't go back to the old way of life. We can only go forward.	32	36%
The question is irrelevant. In paying money for jobs, the government is paying us for taking away our land.	3	3%
Government money is good because it's free.	1	1%
Head of household is too young to be able to compare the past with the present.	<u>8</u> 88	<u>10%</u> 100%

Yet, the great majority of the people felt that in the eventuality that government funds were cut off or sharply reduced, the community would survive. People would go back to intensive trapping or find work outside the reserve. Some, however, felt that only chaos, hunger, and helplessness could result from such a threat to the system because people were already "depressed, lost, and very unhappy". A small number simply

---

49

The open-ended question was phrased as follows: "Only 15 years ago, people at Grassy Narrows used to be independent...Now almost everyone needs money from the government to live. Is this good for the community?"

felt that if anything happened to band work programs they could "always go on welfare."<sup>50</sup> An overriding concern, especially to the middle and older generation of the community, was that in accepting the material benefits of government programs their people would gradually lose their identity and pride as "Indians"; they would lose their special relationship to the land. The older Grassy Narrows people have a clear appreciation of this problem and the issue of their dependency on institutions over which they have no control; they feel powerless, however, to turn back the tide.

### Social Effects of Economic Change

The economic order ushered in after the move to the new reserve had profound implications for many other aspects of the traditional way of life. In the discussion that follows, observations on the social effects of economic change are clustered around four main themes: first, the effect of the new economics on the level and distribution of wealth and on the emergence of inequality in the society; second, the effect of the introduction of cash payments for work or welfare on traditional Indian values; third, the impact of the shift to a cash economy on diet and nutrition; and finally, the implications of changes in the mode of production for women in the society. These issues raise serious questions about the true "benefits" of the model of economic development applied by the Department of Indian Affairs to Grassy Narrows and to all Indian reserves across the country.

### Distribution of Income and Social Stratification

Tables II:7 and II:8 present data on the level and distribution of income among households at Grassy Narrows for the year 1977. The average household income for that year was almost \$11,000. The median household income (the income of the 44th household in the survey of 88 households) was \$11,540. In general, it cannot be said that the people of Grassy Narrows are poor in income terms, especially since the income figures

---

50

The distribution of responses was as follows: 80% of the heads and households felt optimistic about their chances of "surviving" outside of government aid; 13% predicted doom and gloom, and the rest believed that there would always be welfare, no matter what happened.



presented are comparable to the incomes of other Canadians after the payment of federal and provincial income, property, sales, and excise taxes.<sup>51</sup> In spite of the relative affluence of the Grassy Narrows people on the new reserve (compared to the old reserve), the community is more divided into "the haves" and "the have nots" than ever before.

The notion that the new economic order is closely related to social stratification has been discussed in a previous chapter on community life and political order. There we looked at the political and power relationships among clan groups that influence access to work opportunity. At this point, the emphasis shifts to the economic system itself and to the nature and extent of segregation by position or class that is inherent to it. If class becomes real as people experience it, then the Indian people themselves give us an insight into how the development of social classes on the new reserve came about:

"Before we moved to this reserve, our people were much more equal. Everybody made their living like everybody else....But now, the old families of Grassy Narrows, the original families, they're left out of the good jobs, because they are more 'Indian', more traditional, and they're the ones on welfare."<sup>52</sup>

"Everybody talks about 'my people', 'our people'. Hell, on this new reserve, there are those who work steady, and those who are drunk and on welfare. We're the ones on the bottom of the heap. Why doesn't somebody give us a chance?"<sup>53</sup>

"The big division on this reserve is between those who have good, steady, year-round jobs, and everybody else. Those people in the Band office, those who have the good jobs, they don't care about us. I know for sure that my kids don't have a chance on this reserve."<sup>54</sup>

---

51

Indian people living on reserve pay no federal or provincial income taxes on income earned on the reserve. They are also exempt from sales tax on goods purchased for use on the reserve. They pay no property tax or excise tax.

52

Sam Keesick, December 17, 1977.

53

Ivy Keewatin, July 12, 1978.

54

Emo Fontaine, March 29, 1979.

Table II:6

LEVEL AND DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME AT GRASSY NARROWS: 1977

Total amount of income earned on reserve in 1977 by 88 households	\$962,446
Per capita income (all adults & children)*	2,281
Per capita "adult" income**	2,854
Average household income on reserve***	10,940
Median household income on reserve	11,540

<u>Range of Income</u>	<u>Number of Households</u>	<u>Percent of Households</u>	<u>Percent of Population</u>	<u>Average Income</u>
\$20,000 and over	6	7%	11%	\$21,600
\$17,500-\$19,999	4	5%	6%	\$18,900
\$15,000-\$17,499	8	9%	14%	\$16,330
\$12,500-\$14,999	13	15%	18%	\$13,815
\$10,000-\$12,499	12	14%	15%	\$11,250
\$7,500 - \$9,999	19	21%	21%	\$8,560
\$5,000 - \$7,499	18	20%	12%	\$6,400
\$4,999 or less	8	9%	3%	\$4,300

---

\*Because Indian persons earning income on reserve pay no federal or provincial income or sales tax, all the figures for income are comparable to the after-tax income of the Canadian society as a whole. The per capita income is based on a population of 489 persons on reserve in 1977.

\*\*The calculation of "adult" per capita income is based on following criteria: children under the age of 10 are counted as 0.5 adult; children age 11-15 are counted as 0.75 adult; and young persons age 16 and over are counted as 1.0 adult.

\*\*\*Half of all households on reserve earned more than \$10,000 in 1977. Indeed, 64% of the population (43 households) claimed 68% (\$650,395) of the total income earned on reserve in 1977.

Table II:7

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HOUSEHOLD INCOME AND SIZE OF HOUSEHOLD

<u>Household Size</u>	<u>Number of Households</u>	<u>Range of Income</u> <u>Low</u> <u>High</u>	<u>Average Income*</u>
Single individual**	10	\$3,240 - \$6,840	\$5,040
Two persons***	9	\$4,608 - \$8,220	\$6,040
Three persons	15	\$5,192 - \$13,190	\$8,975
Four persons	13	\$6,580 - \$20,784	\$11,535
Five persons	8	\$7,924 - \$21,165	\$15,730
Six persons	7	\$7,080 - \$19,992	\$10,370
Seven persons	11	\$7,100 - \$20,360	\$12,855
Eight persons****	5	\$8,114 - \$14,335	\$11,960
Nine persons	6	\$11,450 - \$21,420	\$17,535
Ten persons	2	\$10,625 - \$15,080	\$12,850
Eleven persons	1	\$18,190	\$18,190
Thirteen persons	<u>1</u>	\$24,402	\$24,400
	88		

---

\*Average income figures have been rounded to the nearest 0 or 5.

\*\*Single individuals usually live in a house with other people, but they may not share their food and/or income with them. In this group, 3 persons receive their entire income from social assistance; the remainder depend on a mix of social assistance and occasional wage labour.

\*\*\*Of these 2-person households, 5 couples are pensioners and the rest depend heavily on welfare. In general, households of 3 or more persons earn an increasing portion of income from wages.

\*\*\*\*The heaviest dependence on welfare as a source of household income is shown by larger households. For example, of the 5 households consisting of 8 persons, only one household does not depend on welfare as a primary source of income. Of the six 9-person households, 5 are completely welfare-dependent. The 13-person household receives more than half of its income of \$24,400 from social assistance.

The division of people into "the haves" and "the have nots", and the articulation of the difference in terms of differences in the ways of earning a living and life chances for children provide subjective evidence of the nature of the evolving social and economic segregation. Social inequality, moreover, is not necessarily a function of income alone. Indeed, inasmuch as 64% of the total population of the reserve claimed 68% of the total income earned or received in 1977, the distribution of income at Grassy Narrows is more closely equal than for Canadian society as a whole. From the 1977 household survey, it is also clear that many heads of household who feel that they are "on the bottom" of the social order are not necessarily poor in income terms. Often these households have a higher level of total income than the average. They feel they are part of the "underclass" because they cannot get the "good, steady jobs"; they have to rely on occasional and seasonal work augmented by welfare and other forms of transfer payment.<sup>55</sup>

In many respects, therefore, the economic system of the new reserve is inherently discriminatory. For the limited number of year-round jobs available on the reserve, two-thirds of which are in Band administration, the system favours younger Band members who speak English, who can deal with the outside society on its own terms, and who can service the needs of the institutions that fuel the economy in the first place. It is not surprising that the more traditional families of Grassy Narrows feel left out of the benefits of the new economic order. Many of these families form part of the class that is most dependent on welfare and other forms of payment not based on work. With their traditional values of independence, self-sufficiency, and hard work, the dependency on welfare has a stigmatizing social effect. These old families, however, are not alone; a substantial portion of households belong to the "underclass" of Grassy Narrows. The full extent of social stratification in the community is suggested by data showing the percent of total income that each household derives from transfer payments as opposed to work. These data are presented in Table II:8.

---

55

The shared characteristic of many of those heads of household who commented on their own position in the community and placed themselves on the bottom of the social strata was that at least 40% of their total annual household income came from welfare or other transfer payments.

Table II:8

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION ACCORDING TO SOURCE OF INCOME

<u>Percent of Total Annual Household Income Derived from Transfer Payments</u>	<u>No. of Heads of Household</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>
75% - 100%	17	20%
50% - 74%	9	10%
40% - 49%	10	11%
25% - 39%	19	22%
0% - 24%	<u>33</u>	<u>37%</u>
	88	100%

An analysis of the characteristics of each of the above strata reveals that the economic order of the new reserve does discriminate in favour of the young. Of the group of 33 heads of household who derive less than 24% of their total income from transfer payments, half are between 20 - 24 years of age and two-thirds are less than 34 years of age. All are employed full-time; 18 work in the band administration, 12 have steady jobs in various band work projects, and 3 work in the private sector. In contrast, of the 19 heads of household who derive between 40% and 74% of total income from transfer payments, 16 are over 35 years of age. All members in this group rely to a much greater extent on income from trapping and guiding; they depend heavily on welfare and/or unemployment insurance in-between periods of occasional work on band work projects and participation in traditional activities. Many individuals in this group, and also in the group that is slightly less dependent on supplementary income from transfer payments, face major barriers to occupational mobility. Finally, the group that is most dependent upon transfer payments (over 75% of total income is derived from that source) includes old age pensioners, single parents, disabled persons, and female heads of household. The opprobrium that is attached to the able-bodied members of the labour force, who are unable to provide for themselves and their families through working, does not apply to this group.

This brief overview of social stratification leads to some observations on the impact of the new economics on the values of mutual aid and collective responsibility.

### The New Economics and Social Values

We have previously noted that the new reserve economic order creates distinctions between the rich young, who have annual salaries, and the poor middle-aged who intersperse work for wages with hunting, trapping, and welfare. The distinctions between welfare and wage labour, moreover, are not limited to the amount or the pervasiveness of payments by source. Rather, the problem relates to the very form in which wages or welfare payments are given, that is to individual households. On the old reserve, whereas bush resources such as moose and wild rice used to be shared within the kin group, cash income was treated as private property and not shared except perhaps to purchase certain tools that were shared by the kin group. Michael Asch, in writing about the intrusion of southern white values and institutions into the way of life of the Dene people in Canada's north, makes the following observation about the effect of welfare payments on native communities:

"...the introduction of welfare payments, in their present form, created the individualization of poverty and helped relieve the community of the traditional responsibility to help one another. This then led to the undermining of the values of collective responsibility which are part of the reciprocal economy and subtly led to the forced acceptance of the value of individual responsibility which is characteristic of our economy. In this sense, welfare represents a social intrusion that goes far beyond the mere question of dollars and cents, for it creates a perfidious influence on the native people to change their values.... Wage labour...is [also] acting...to change values away from mutual sharing and towards individualistic ones...[and] it is concentrating wealth in the hands of those who are least capable or willing to use it in socially useful ways, while at the same time helping to undermine the respect for others who perform socially more valuable labour."<sup>56</sup>

In less elaborate language, the Grassy Narrows people also express a concern for the effect of welfare on the values of mutual sharing:

---

<sup>56</sup>

Michael Asch, "The Dene Economy", in Dene Nation - the colony within, edited by Mel Watkins, (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1977), p. 56-67.

"The dependence that we have on welfare is a real problem. First, we don't support each other any more. On the old reserve, if a man had a broken leg and couldn't get his own food or couldn't chop his own wood, the neighbours or somebody would chip in and help him with his wood, or with food, or whatever. Today, as soon as a family runs out of groceries after they have spent all their money on drinks, the people go and see the welfare administrator. This dependency on welfare is bad for us."<sup>57</sup>

In the above passage, there is a subtle distinction that is made between the use of the word "food", when speaking of the old reserve, and the use of the word "groceries" when referring to the new reserve. This is not just a difference in semantics; rather, this choice of words embodies important differences in basic meaning and it brings us to the third theme in the discussion of the social effects of economic change.

#### The Cash Economy and Diet

It would not be an exaggeration to suggest that the economy created by cash subsidies from government contributed to a sudden and radical shift in traditional patterns of food production, preparation, and diet. In a span of only fifteen years the Grassy Narrows people changed from being active producers of most of their own food to passive consumers of store-bought groceries. Moreover, in the time span of a single generation, the diet of the people changed from a protein-rich diet of game and fish to a nutritionally inferior diet of imported food staples heavy in starch and sugar. On the old reserve the Grassy Narrows people relied predominantly on "country food" like moose, deer, beaver, muskrat, and rabbit; on fish like pickerel, whitefish, trout, and northern pike; on fowl like ducks, wild geese, and partridge. Both meat and fish were smoked or dried for winter use. Berries, like strawberries, blueberries, and raspberries, were gathered and dried.<sup>58</sup> The diet was rich in protein,

---

<sup>57</sup>

Interview with John and Kathy Fobister, April 10, 1979.

<sup>58</sup>

Much of the Indians' vitamin A and C came from berries. The berries were dried for use throughout the winter, and I have been told that dried raspberries were very valuable for lowering fever. Other vegetable food, such as roots and leaf greens, were also gathered by the Grassy Narrows people.

but not completely devoid of carbohydrates. Bannock made from flour was an important staple since the advent of trading and trapping, and wild rice always had a very special place in the nutritional habits and culture of the northwestern Ontario Ojibwa. Certain vegetables such as potatoes, onions, turnips, and squash were cultivated in family garden plots and kept in root cellars for winter use. Imported food was limited to the following staples purchased from the Hudson's Bay store: flour, lard, baking powder, salt, sugar, raisins, tea, and canned evaporated milk.<sup>59</sup> The food quest was not only an integral part of the mode of livelihood on the old reserve, but it was also closely linked to other parts of the culture, to moral and social conceptions and practices and to ceremonial and spiritual observances and beliefs.

After the relocation of the reserve, the food quest lost its central place in the economic system. As male heads of household "went to work" for wages from eight to four, or "went to work" for training allowances from nine to five, women "went shopping for groceries" at the Hudson's Bay store. The Bay, of course, expanded its stock of foodstuffs to take advantage of the influx of cash income into the new reserve. Its new location on the Jones Road also made it easier to obtain a greater variety of foodstuffs from Kenora.<sup>60</sup> By the early 1970's, the Grassy Narrows people were buying over 75% of all their food needs from the Hudson's Bay store.<sup>61</sup> They were buying primarily white bread, Kraft macaroni dinners, canned meat like beef stew, pork sausage and hamburger, cans of spaghetti and pork and beans, white rice, and large quantities of

---

59

According to Norman Schantz, the Mennonite missionary, the Bay would also very occasionally fly in crates of oranges or apples.

60

In 1959, the Hudson's Bay Company moved to a new location on the Jones Road in order to take advantage of lower transportation costs and benefit from the potential tourist trade. The possible link between the Bay's relocation and the relocation of the Grassy Narrows reserve is explored in the next chapter.

61

Carol Farkas, "Components of the Northern Canadian Indian Diet and Mercury Toxicity," Mercury Project, National Indian Brotherhood, June 1976, p. 18.



"junk food" and carbonated beverages.

The shift from "country food" to store-bought groceries has had at least three major nutritional impacts.<sup>62</sup> First, there has been a decrease in protein intake and an increase in fat consumption. It is well known that game meat and fish are much richer in nutritionally important protein and less potentially harmful in fat than the meat of domesticated animals. The protein content of moose, for example, is 26 mg/100 gm edible portion; that of hamburger is 16 mg/100 gm. The fat content of moose is 1.1 gm/100 gm; that of hamburger is 28 gm/100 gm.<sup>63</sup> Second, there has been a significant increase in the intake of carbohydrates. In the traditional Indian diet, carbohydrates were available in limited amounts and in a slowly digestible and complex form. The new reserve diet has become much heavier in those forms of carbohydrate (pasta and sugar in particular) which are rapidly absorbable and lead to sudden blood sugar peaks. In fact, there has been a phenomenal rise in the consumption of sugar, especially by children, in such forms as soft drinks (which can contain up to 10% sugar), candies, chocolates, and sweet biscuits. Third, there has been a marked change on the new reserve from breastfeeding to bottle feeding of infants. The fact that the baby formula may be as nutritionally adequate as mother's milk is less important in this connection than the trend to substitute the formula for bottle feeding with tea made with stagnant lake water, a little condensed milk, and

---

62

Although the discussion that follows is limited to nutritional impacts, it should also be noted that the shift to store-bought food is related to values. Country food (moose meat, wild rice) is usually shared with others; that is the moral code of the community. Groceries, like cash income, are viewed as private property and are generally not shared.

63

Otto Schaefer, M.D. "Health in our time?" The Canadian Nurse, October 1978, p. 34.

several spoons of white sugar.<sup>64</sup> This departure from traditional ways of infant nutrition has also been shown to have negative health and immunological consequences.<sup>65</sup>

There is ample evidence from studies of similar situations that the changes in native dietary patterns have led to new health problems for both adults and children. The effect of increased sugar consumption on dental health has been disastrous. Excess caloric intake, from alcohol as well as from fats and other carbohydrates, has led to diseases that were either absent or very rare on the old reserve like gallbladder disease and adult-onset diabetes. Indians now have problems with obesity, with vitamin deficiencies, with anemia linked to iron deficiency, with acne, and with excess fat and cholesterol levels in blood and tissues.<sup>66</sup> These are all problems typical of more affluent societies. Related to the change in diet, and inseparable from the transition to store-bought food, however, is yet another change of far-reaching social importance, namely, the displacement of women from their role as food producers and providers.

---

64

The day care supervisor at Grassy Narrows has made this observation about the diet of children on the reserve: "All the children here eat a lot of potato chips, candy, and chocolate, and their teeth are often rotten-black. Some in grade 1 don't have teeth, except rotten stumps, and this is also true of about half of my children in day care. A lot of that is due to babies left sleeping with a bottle in their mouth which contains tea with lots of sugar. The sugar just sits in the mouth and you've got to remember that the women here use bottles for feeding until the child is about 4 years old." Peggy Halcrow, January 19, 1980.

65

According to Dr. Otto Schaefer, a study in the Northwest Territories proved that much higher hospitalization rates occur among bottle-fed infants compared to breast-fed infants. Further, much higher infant mortality rates are recorded for bottle-fed babies, perhaps because these infants are less protected by antibodies contained in mother's milk. Otto Schaefer, "Changing Dietary Patterns in the Canadian North: Health, Social and Economic Consequences," Journal of the Canadian Dietetic Association, vol. 38, No. 1, January 1977.

66

There may be other related physiological effects of the change in nutritional patterns: a decreased ability to deal with stress; an increased susceptibility to other diseases such as atherosclerosis; an emergent hypertension, and so on. Medical people working in the north have documented differences in growth and development in native populations related to nutritional changes taking place in about the same time period. Doctors like Otto Schaefer plead for measures to encourage and facilitate harvesting, preservation, and distribution of local food resources. They plead for a return to the traditional Indian and Inuit dietary patterns.

### Transformation in the Role of Women

Even at the risk of going over familiar ground, it is necessary to summarize in a nutshell the duties of the woman on the old reserve in order to accentuate the nature of the change in her role under the circumstances of the new reserve. On the trapline, she skinned the animals while the man checked the traps. Aided by her children, she set snares for rabbits, fetched water, and cut wood. On the wild rice fields, she shared the onerous task of harvesting and later processing the green rice. In those families who were involved in commercial fishing, she was often the mainstay of the enterprise. In the summer garden, she was responsible for planting, caring, and harvesting. She gathered berries and dried them; she gathered roots and other medicinal herbs. She tanned hides and manufactured clothing and moccasins. She created art work. She alone was responsible for food preparation and food storage by drying or smoking. On the old reserve, the woman was an equal partner with the man in the activities necessary for subsistence and survival.

In contrast, after the move to the new reserve, the woman lost her function as a producer and partner in livelihood; she became a consumer. This happened suddenly and she did not have time to adjust, to re-define her role, to find a substitute for certain vital activities that no longer belonged to her, that she was not a part of. Two areas of her work were swept out from under her immediately: trapping ceased to be a way of life for the family when the children were brought to the reserve school; and, gardening was impossible under the soil and spatial conditions of the new reserve. Wage employment, moreover, was not an alternative to the loss of purposeful and productive activity. The jobs initially available in construction went to men, and the opportunities to earn income from participation in training courses were also taken by men. With the shift to a cash economy and store-bought groceries, the woman could buy packaged and ready-made food and this eliminated the effort required to cook meals or to prepare food for storage. She could purchase everything that she had once been able to produce. So to be without work was to be idle, and yet the daily bread appeared whether one was idle or not. There was always welfare. In this way, what was dissolved was the connection between the obligation to work and access to the necessities of life. If the work of woman, upon which survival was not dependent, was work not needed, then it

followed that the woman whose work was no longer knotted into one, were rent apart.<sup>67</sup>

Of course, this transformation in the woman's role under the conditions of the new reserve did not affect all generations of women equally. The younger women under the age of 25 know nothing of the old ways and have experienced no other way of life than that represented by packaged, convenience foods, Pampers, and bottle feeding for their infants. Their perceptions of the world are derived from television and advertising, and their values are constantly being influenced in the direction of consumerism and cultural uniformity with the mainstream society.<sup>68</sup> In contrast, the older generation of women over the age of 50 are now grandmothers and matriarchs of large family groups. Women like Maryann Keewatin and Maggie Land have lived on the traplines, have tanned hides for clothing, have used moss for diapers, have fed their families from the abundant resources of the land. These women are very secure; they know who they are; they have the traditional skills and they have not lost the culture. They may lament passionately the changes that have taken place in their world but, as individuals and as a group, they did not lose their ability to relate their lives meaningfully to an entity larger than themselves.<sup>69</sup>

The impact of the transition in the role of women was felt most acutely by the generation of women between age 30 and 50 caught between two ways of life. These women are the daughters of the generation

---

67

This description is particularly applicable to the majority of women at Grassy Narrows who do not work and who remain at home with nothing to do. There are very few job opportunities for women on the reserve. The day care center offers employment to 3 or 4 women. The only other positions open to women are: janitorial jobs, nurses' aide, secretary in the band office, alcohol worker, and possibly one or two other positions in the band administration. Out of the total female labour force (age 16-64) on reserve in 1977, only 12 women (13%) were employed full-time.

68

Television was introduced to the community in 1975; by 1977, 98% of all the houses on the reserve had at least one TV set. Television is on continuously throughout the day.

69

The older generation of women occupy themselves with the care of their grandchildren, thus performing a traditional role. Maggie Land and Maryann Keewatin also work for wages full-time. Maggie works as a janitor in the school; Maryann runs the school lunch program during the school year and in the summer, she works at Delaney Lodge.

represented by Maggie Land; they are the mothers of the "modern" generation living by the beat of rock and the pulse of the TV screen. The response of the middle generation of women to the change in society, and their role within it, can be described as "a catastrophic response".<sup>70</sup> It is this group of women that has been reduced to the state of a passive consumer; it is this group that has lost the connection between skills and the capacity to use them in an effective or useful way. The experience of a loss of capacity, or "marginalization" in terms of meaningful activity, has resulted not in an adaptation to the new environment but in a capitulation to it. The manifestations of this capitulation appear in various forms. More than three-quarters of the women between age 30 and 50 are very heavy drinkers. Only four women, out of the 33 women in this age group, are employed. The greatest incidence of child abandonment, child neglect, and child abuse is found among the families of women in their middle years. These women are responsible for the cases of infanticide. They have stopped "caring for tomorrow" and more importantly, in not caring for their own offspring, they have produced another generation

---

70

This term has a specific meaning in psychology, and therefore it is important to reproduce here the "context" in which such terminology is applied. The following passage is an excerpt from an interview with Andy Mikita, a clinical psychologist:

"What you describe for Grassy Narrows reminds me of the work I did with patients that had, as one of the effects of brain damage, a loss of a sense of capacity over previous functions which they cannot now account for. The person cannot comment on his/her loss of capacity. You can test people for the extent of this. The request to do a certain task makes sense to the person being tested; he can sense that he had the capacity to do this task before, but he cannot cope with it now. The person has a definite sense of loss. The entire thing is very subtle, and also very profound, and that's why psychologists didn't know what to call it, except 'a catastrophic response.'

What happens is that a person feels an impotence...so basically psychic that it leaves the person unable to account for his situation in the first instance. The first reaction is usually to give in, to capitulate, to the loss of capacity. Or, there is an attempt to rationalize, to compensate. What we have always found interesting is that a similar kind of brain damage produced different reactions in people, and that these reactions were subject to the personality organization of the individual.

How does this analogy apply to Indian people? What can you say about the personality organization and the culture of Indians that would lead you

of women that does not care for its offspring. Thus, the economic system that rendered irrelevant the productive capacities of one generation of women and re-defined their role in terms of its own requirements for consumption, continues to impact on succeeding generations of women. The grim consequences of the change in the role of women on today's children in Grassy Narrows have been described elsewhere in this work.<sup>71</sup>

To the planners of economic betterment for Indian people, it was probably not obvious that a bi-weekly wage or allowance or subsidy could never be the equivalent of, or a replacement for, the multiple and complex rewards of the way of livelihood on the old reserve. In programming the new reserve to take advantage of the benefits of modern life, government officials no doubt had the best of intentions. Only in retrospect has it become clear that the two modes of organizing the material base of existence cannot coexist, and that it is impossible to substitute wage labour and subsidies for aspects of the traditional mode of production without tearing down a great deal besides.

---

to conclude that some amount of the self-destructive behaviour so evident in Grassy Narrows, for example, is a response to a loss of capacity on the level of the collectivity as a whole? We know that Indian people were uprooted. We also know that if the basic life-supporting activities are eroded over time, then after a while, the next generation doesn't know what it has lost. This is why it is important to study the time sequence with reference to generations....One kind of response is to develop inappropriate responses, to completely give in to the new state. The other major thing that happens is passivity, a complete acceptance of the forces beyond your control. This response to the loss of capacity is a kind of capitulation. But this is a state of nothingness, and the human organism cannot tolerate such a state for a prolonged period. The manifest responses to this take the form of alcoholism, child neglect, social pathology, and often self-destruction."

Andy Mikita, June 16, 1980.

71

See the sections on child abuse, neglect, and abandonment in Part I. In particular, attention should be drawn to the extent to which even the young mothers have abdicated their responsibilities for caring and nurturing their children. It is important to note that the group of women in their child-bearing years (age 15-29) is quite a large one consisting of 61 females.

### The "Benefits" of the New Economics

The Grassy Narrows people are not entirely unaware of the contradictions imposed upon them. They recognize certain material benefits arising from the new reserve way of life, yet they also are conscious of the price they paid in terms of their dependency, the social costs of alcoholism, and their freedom:

"When the people moved to the new reserve, they became better-off in some ways. They got better houses, more cash, they were nearer to a road, they got better care by doctors. This brought some problems, but life on the old reserve was much harder. People worked hard to eat. They were skinnier. They depended on trapping and fishing ...there were no wage-jobs like there are today. Life is much easier, but why do so many people die of alcohol today?"<sup>72</sup>

"Life is more easy now. But before...you could depend on your own people, and now you have to depend on the white man. The white man has taken over in the most basic things. Now the government people tell you what to do. We had a lot more freedom in the old days. We gave up the freedom to use the land in exchange for getting things from the white man. Freedom was not a good thing to trade."<sup>73</sup>

"People were freer in the old reserve, to hunt, trap, fish, to make a living. I would say it was hard work, but they were happier."<sup>74</sup>

It is a poignant commentary on the "modern" way of life that whereas 80% of all the heads of household surveyed in 1977 believe that life at Grassy Narrows today is "easier" and "more prosperous" in material terms than it was in "our father's time", 69% of those same people say that they are not happy "spiritually". They say they feel lost, that their roots have been shattered. They feel insecure in the

---

<sup>72</sup> John Swain, March 23, 1979.

<sup>73</sup> Charlie Fobister, March 9, 1979.

<sup>74</sup> Andy Keewatin, excerpt from the film, "Grassy Narrows--a people between..."

economic system because jobs are limited and government funding of "make-work" projects is unpredictable. More importantly, the people know they have no control over the nature of the spending which impinges upon, and interacts with, the structure of their own society. They therefore speak with nostalgia about the security of seasonal work, the independence and self-sufficiency characteristic of the old reserve way of life. <sup>75</sup> Given the past social, ceremonial and spiritual setting in which many productive activities were grounded, it is easy to understand why modern "economic development" can never really substitute for the mode of livelihood that is no more.

At the same time, the Indian people now face a formidable dilemma. Once they have become used to and dependent upon the material benefits of economic development, it is hard for them even to imagine what life might be like without them. Yet the increasing materialism of their present way of life poses grave impediments to the attainment of the aspirations embedded in their traditional culture. Thus, their future becomes more and more difficult.

---

<sup>75</sup>

The survey question to elicit people's perception of socio-economic mobility was phrased as follows: "Do you think you live better today than your father did in his lifetime?" Of 88 heads of household who answered this question, 71 (80%) replied that yes, they lived better in all respects (better house, more money, more food). Four persons (7%) thought that life was better but qualified their answers; and, 11 persons (13%) said that life was much better on the old reserve. In their opinion, the log houses on the old reserve that the people built themselves were warmer, more solid, more resistant to fire, and more adapted to the needs of the Indian family. This last group did not think much of the "benefits" of modern life.

The other question on the quality of life on the new reserve was open-ended and phrased as follows: "Maybe people today have an easier life, materially-speaking, but are they happier, spiritually?" The great majority, 69 heads of household, (78%) answered in the following terms: "people are lost...people are depressed...there is too much violence, too much fighting, too much drinking...There is no job security...People are sick, not spiritually happy." The younger heads of household seemed to be more satisfied with money and material goods (26%) and the rest (5%) could not answer the question.



In concluding this chapter on changes in the mode of production following the move to the new reserve, it is appropriate to pose two closely related questions: first, who really benefits from the kind of development set in motion in Indian communities by the federal government? Second, does this development lead to the stated goal of "the full, free, and non-discriminatory participation of Indian people in Canadian society?" The question of the direction in which the benefits of economic development flow at Grassy Narrows is answered, in part, by statistics on household expenditures (Table II:9).

The data in Table II:9 provoke a number of observations. First, an immense proportion of the money that comes into the reserve in the form of transfer payments and wages flows out immediately in the form of payments to outside suppliers of goods and services. Upon calculation, we find that \$886,000 or 97.4% of the total amount of household income received by the community leaves the community. The lion's share of this amount (60%) is absorbed by the Hudson's Bay Company, but a significant percentage (23%) returns to the Ontario Liquor Control Board. Only 2.6% of all income that flows into the community is spent in the community.<sup>76</sup> There are obviously few linkages among sectors, very little income generated in the local economy through spending, and an almost non-existent multiplier effect. The second observation, which flows from the first, is that an overwhelming proportion of total income is spent on consumption rather than investment in productive assets or equipment, and further, much of this consumption is oriented to the purchase of goods and services that people once used to produce themselves.

---

<sup>76</sup>

In years subsequent to 1977, a slightly higher percentage would be spent in the community due to the opening of the Grassy Narrows Band store on the reserve.

Table II:9

HOUSEHOLD EXPENDITURES

<u>Category of Expenditure</u>	<u>Amount*</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Food, clothing, hardware, tools, supplies and deposits on account for major purchases in 1977: The Hudson's Bay Co.	\$448,000	46.6%
Food, clothing, tools, supplies purchased from stores other than the Hudson's Bay Co. or in Kenora stores	34,000	3.5%
Children's allowance**	29,500	3.1%
Gasoline for vehicles, skidoos, boats; fuel oil, payments for wood, for electricity	83,100	8.6%
Deposits or partial payments on houses, and vehicles	6,000	0.6%
Savings	7,000	0.7%
Entertainment***	12,000	1.2%
Indebtedness****	40,250	4.2%
Expenditure related to alcohol use		
Alcohol purchase	201,000	
Transportation to town, taxi costs	60,250	28.5%
Payment of fines related to alcohol offences	13,000	
Sub-total	\$934,100	
Expenditure unaccounted for by above items	28,346	3.0%
	\$962,446	100.0%

---

\*The amounts of expenditures have been estimated on the basis of the following sources: survey data from households; financial records of household accounts at the Bay Co.; interviews with suppliers to the reserve.

\*\*This is an important item of expenditure because people give children large amounts of money for "junk food" (candy, potato chips, carbonated beverages).

\*\*\*Entertainment includes such things as trips to Winnipeg and ramoulli and bingo games on the reserve.

\*\*\*\*Indebtedness encompasses the money owed to various businesses in Kenora, for example, Mel and Ruth's taxi service and Walstein's air service. This does not include indebtedness to the Bay.

The following statement is an apt commentary on this situation:

"Development, as it is often practised, I would say is one of the politer terms for an age-old process. It is the polite modern form of the process where the people of one culture arrange the affairs of people of another culture. And the arrangement is usually done in the former's image. The outsider had a mixed bag of intentions - some good and some bad. We wanted them to accept the wage economy, improve their health standards. We wanted to Christianize them, we wanted to educate them. Educate them for what? Cynics would say - 'educate them to want the goods and services we had to sell'. Educate them, in other words, to become more efficient consumers."<sup>77</sup>

The real beneficiaries of the kind of economic development that is practiced at Grassy Narrows may well be the companies and individuals who profit from the increased demand, on the part of the Indian people, for the goods and services that they have to offer.<sup>78</sup> In the context of this relationship between production and consumption, the unprecedented increase in the level of household incomes on the reserve cannot be interpreted as conclusive evidence of the flow of "benefits" to Indian people. Whatever the levels of income earned from wage labour or received from transfer payments, the final calculus of benefit has to take into account the economic and social costs of separating the Indian people from the means of production, and reducing earnings or earning-equivalents from

---

77

Donald G. Simpson, "Prepared Evidence before the National Energy Board in the Matter of Phase 3: Socio-Economic, Environmental and other Public Interest Matters," Hearings on the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline. Unpublished papers, Committee for Justice and Liberty Foundation, Toronto.

78

The Hudson's Bay Company store at Grassy Narrows is, of course, one of the major beneficiaries. However, there is substantial evidence for the assertion that many Kenora businesses profit from the Indians' alcohol abuse, especially those businesses involved in the transport of persons to town by air or taxi, and those selling liquor (the drinking lounges and bars). The Ontario government, through its tax revenues on the sale of alcohol and through alcohol-related fines, is also an indirect beneficiary of Indian alcoholism.

land-based and traditional activities.<sup>79</sup>

This brings us to the final point. However the net benefit of development is calculated, the Grassy Narrows people perceive that there has been an improvement in the material conditions of their existence. The fact that the increase in their material well-being is not a consequence of their participation on the productive side of an expanding economy, however, has important implications with respect to the question of whether or not the kind of development promoted by the federal government has brought the Indian people any closer to the goal of free and equal participation in Canadian society. The answer has been implicit in our discussion all along. What government policy and the "economic development process" have accomplished is to push the Indian people further away from participation in the productive activities of the nation than they have ever been, to separate them from the means of production embodied essentially in land and in the resources of the land, and to turn the Indian people into men and women who have neither land nor capital nor even a secure place among those Canadians who sell only their labour. The increase in the standard of living must be seen not as a result of free and equal participation in Canadian society, but as compensation, paid by the society, for the continued exclusion of Indian people from the productive processes of the nation. The ultimate hallmark of this kind of development is not participation, but marginality.

The next chapter leaves the path of inquiry into the effects of the relocation decision and moves into an examination of the context of decision-making inside the federal bureaucracy.

---

79

The increase in incomes due to make-work projects must be balanced against the reduction in income arising from the displacement of land-based activities like trapping. Further, one of the consequences of wage labour has been the shift to store-bought goods and a substantial reduction in the production of "country foods". These country foods once represented another form of income; therefore, they have an annual income equivalent. The point here is that the impact of economic development includes the loss of income as well as the gain of income.

## Chapter 9.

### RELOCATION AND THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

In the last six chapters, we tried to describe what happened to the culture of the people of Grassy Narrows after they were moved from the old to the new reserve. We looked at the culture "from the inside" so to speak, from the perspective of how ideas, symbols, and rituals help shape human personality and behaviour, and how institutions give form to core values and structure relationships within and among family groups. We documented how the integrating forces of the society came apart after the relocation to the new site. It seemed hard to believe that the transplantation alone was responsible for such rapid decline. Certainly the physical uprooting was symbolic of the new geographic alignment with the white society and the inevitable collision with the "modern" world. Yet, we wondered whether or not the seeds of the collapse of a way of life were planted earlier, whether the change had been evolving over a longer period of time. Perhaps the relocation had simply brought things to a head; it "focused" the troubles. Whatever our predisposition to historical causality might be, it is important to remember that the people of Grassy Narrows perceive the relocation to be a watershed in their lives. They see the relocation as the single most important event in the history of the Band since Treaty.

How did this relocation come about? Who made the decisions? What was the ideological and policy context for the decision to relocate? What was the nature of the planning process at the time? These and other questions comprise the framework for this chapter.

### The Decision to Relocate

The story of the relocation decision is not an easy one to reconstruct. An extensive search of government documents and sources, conducted on four separate occasions by four different people, turned up only a handful of references to the event of the relocation of the Grassy Narrows reserve.<sup>1</sup> The single most pertinent document is a letter dated July 8, 1964 from the then Superintendent of the Kenora Indian Agency, Mr. Eric Law, to the Minister of Mines and Technical Surveys in Ottawa, The Honourable W. Benedickson. This letter contains the only known exposition of the government's attitude and stance on the issue of relocating the Grassy Narrows community.

---

1

In 1977, a search of government files on Grassy Narrows (which was also called English River #21) was carried out by the headquarters' staff of the Department of Indian Affairs (DIAND). Eleven files related to the subject of relocation were examined; among these were files entitled "Surveys and Reserves - English River; Community Planning - Kenora; School Building - English River; Resettlement of Indians - Kenora General; and English River #21; Community Planning - English River; and "Agency Lands and Estates - English River." It is quite remarkable that none of these files for the period of the early 1960's had any information concerning the relocation.

During 1977, I conducted my own search through DIAND Annual Reports and files made available to me on Grassy Narrows by the Treaties and Historical Research Center in Ottawa. Aside from scattered fragments of information on the construction of the new school and the new houses, the word "relocation" or "resettlement" did not appear in any of the files I examined. There were also no references to "community planning" or to "a new community".

In 1979, under pressure from the mediation process, another exhaustive search for information on the relocation was undertaken at all levels of the bureaucracy. This search was conducted by Ron Penner, a senior policy officer of DIAND in Ottawa. Mr. Penner admitted that his search turned up no substantiating information either to confirm or deny the Band's allegation that the relocation decision was made in secrecy without consultation with Band members.

During the same year, Harry Veldstra of the Kenora district office of DIAND searched the district archives and uncovered the above mentioned letter. This letter is a rare piece of documentation.

In this letter, Mr. Law puts on record the "governmental" position on the two key issues of the relocation decision on which there is a sharp divergence of opinion with Band members. The first issue is who made the decision to move the reserve; the second is why the reserve was moved to the new site. Mr. Law states that the "Band decided" all important matters of location:

"About five years ago the Grassy Narrows Band Council requested a Day School be constructed on their Reserve. They also wanted a road into their reserve from the Jones Road so that they could go to Kenora and the new Hudson Bay Store which was planned for construction on the Jones Road....

The Band Council had several meetings with me and they decided where they wanted their road and the new school. Finding it impossible to get a road into the old settlement, and their location of the road and the new school five miles away, the Band decided on a long range plan of developing a new community around the area they set aside for the new school and sports ground...."<sup>2</sup>

The memory of the Grassy Narrows people is at odds with Mr. Law's contention that the Band Council made location decisions. Andy Keewatin, who over a period of thirty years held either the position of Chief or Band Councillor, remembers things differently:

"When we were moved, nobody asked us anything. They told us what we had to do. First they built five houses, at least two years before anyone moved to the new site. I was still on the old reserve when John Kennedy died, and that was in November 1963. At that time, Eric Law was the Indian Agent. They, the Government, just gave the Indians orders. They also told us that if we didn't move to the new reserve, all the people would have their family allowances cut off. That's the way it was."<sup>3</sup>

---

2

Letter from Eric Law, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Kenora Indian Agency, to the Honourable Wm. M. Benedickson, Minister of Mines and Technical Surveys, July 8, 1964. File no. 129/29-2-257(A).

3

Andy Keewatin, January 5, 1979.

John Beaver has a similar perspective on the decision process:

"One day the Indian Agent asked the Chief if the Government could move the reserve without gathering the Band Council for a meeting, without talking to anybody. The Chief and the Indian Agent only talked to themselves, in private. They never told anybody anything. Indian Affairs people just came into the reserve one day and said, 'We're going to move you people. You'll be close to the Hudson's Bay store. We'll give you a school, and houses, and hydro. We'll give you welfare and jobs on the new reserve.'"4

Recollections of the personality of the Indian Agent in Kenora by persons who had worked with him, combined with the prevailing policy of the Indian Affairs Department to "manage and control Indians", tend to confirm the people's own assertions that the relocation was imposed on them. Stu Martin, a long-time Indian Affairs employee who had arrived in Kenora shortly after the Grassy Narrows relocation, remembers Eric Law as an authoritarian personality, who had little contact with, or understanding of, Indian people:

"[Eric Law] was a do-nothing type of man. Just wanted to keep the peace. He wanted his people to stay in the office all day. I'll give you an example. Eric Law visited Grassy Narrows only once, and he was Superintendent of the Kenora office for about eight years. His attitude was that he didn't care to visit Indians and he didn't want anybody else visiting them either."5

It is now recognized that in this period of Departmental administration of Indian affairs,

"...there was a certain coercion or lack of involvement of Indian people in decisions... In terms of relocating communities in those days, leadership at the community level in some cases was either weak or nonexistent. I am sure

---

4 John Beaver, March 10, 1979. Pat Loon translator.

5 Stu Martin, March 8, 1980 in Kenora.



arbitrary decisions were made by government bureaucrats, partly well intentioned, under the impression that because the Indians could not articulate their own needs, 'we know what's best for them, and the best thing for them is to move them.' In the case of Grassy Narrows, people in the district probably thought that they were bringing the Indians closer to 'civilization'... 'what the hell, the Indians can buy a car and drive to work in Kenora'-kind of attitude. It was wrong, very wrong, and we live with the results of this attitude today."<sup>6</sup>

The relocation took three years to implement at Grassy Narrows. The first houses were constructed in 1961, yet by late 1963 only four families had moved to the new site. Under the "carrot and stick approach", the promises of jobs and welfare and the threat of family allowance withdrawals, the people moved to the new reserve gradually; the last family finally left the old reserve in 1972. A long-time friend of the Grassy Narrows people, Father Lacelle of the Oblate Order, described the people's attitude to the relocation this way:

"The people hated to move to the new reserve but most of them moved because they had no choice. The houses had been built and that was it. Some told me that at least they were happy that they would have a new house, because the houses on the old reserve were quite poor. The question that still troubles many people at Grassy is why they were moved in the first place."<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, the rationale for the decision to relocate the Band is the second issue on which there are conflicting opinions between Mr. Law and Band members. In his letter, Mr. Law stated that it was "impossible to get a road into the old settlement" presumably because the old reserve was composed of islands and peninsulas accessible only by water or by air. Yet, there was an old logging path connecting the main reserve territory with the Jones Road. The people do not believe that the

---

<sup>6</sup> Interview with David Nicholson, Assistant Deputy Minister, DIAND, July 4, 1980, Ottawa.

<sup>7</sup> Father Lacelle, O.M.B., April 3, 1979 in Winnipeg.

technical difficulties of constructing a road to the old reserve constituted the reason for the relocation. Some older people feel strongly that their reserve was moved in order to further the interests of the Hudson's Bay Company. The Bay had moved to a new location on the Jones Road in 1959 in order to take advantage of lower transportation costs and to profit from the tourist trade which the Company could see coming. The following excerpts from conversations with the heads of three of the major clans at Grassy Narrows speak to the "hidden agenda" in the decision to relocate. Another message is also transmitted in these passages, namely, that one of the effects of the relocation, intended or unintended, was to transform the Grassy Narrows people from independent producers of most of their own food to consumers heavily dependent upon the Hudson's Bay Company.

"I say, look here...You white people built a highway right across Canada, a big highway from the Atlantic to the Pacific. You built a railroad too, coast to coast. Now you tell me, why couldn't Indian Affairs build a road, go just a few miles to the old reserve from the Jones Road? Why? No, they moved the whole reserve instead.

They moved us to be closer to the Bay. And there were never any meetings with the Band Council. Nobody ever asked the people whether they wanted to move. They ordered us. And the move was very bad for us. There was no reason at all for us to move."<sup>8</sup>

"We could have been on the old reserve today, but the Hudson's Bay wanted us to move and live closer to the road. They told us that prices for our food and supplies would be lower if we did that. But when we moved, we found out that the prices were not lower; they were higher. And now, on the new reserve, we can't have gardens like we used to... Soil here is no good for planting, just dirt and rock. And we're too crowded here. Now we can't grow our own food. Now we have to buy everything at the Bay at higher prices."<sup>9</sup>

---

8

John Beaver, March 10, 1979.

9

John Kokopenace, March 7, 1979.

"I'll tell you this: on the old reserve, the Bay had to fly in its supplies. Sure, they could make more money on the Jones Road, but they also needed our business... So, the government made us move to be closer to the Bay. But on the old reserve, we only used to buy tea, flour, sugar, some cans, some lard. Every family grew its own vegetables ...every family had its own garden, and there was also a community garden on the island at Garden Lake. That's how Garden Lake got its name. The whole island used to be planted with potatoes. Do you see any potatoes on this new reserve? Nothing. Just dirt, and rock, and garbage...People who used to be self-sufficient in vegetables now buy everything from the Bay."<sup>10</sup>

This perception of the relocation decision as a product of conspiratorial planning and cozy relations between two dominant white institutions in Indian life is no doubt rooted in people's memory of past colonial practice. Although such accommodation by Indian Affairs to the commercial interests of the Hudson's Bay Company cannot be ruled out, it would not be correct to base the entire explanation of the decision to relocate on this presumption of motive.<sup>11</sup> An alternative explanation of the rationale for the relocation would have to be grounded in the context of government policy, in the late 1950's and early 1960's, to extend education, housing, and community infrastructure services to remote Indian communities. Within the framework of desire to upgrade Indian reserves, well-intentioned government officials may have been primarily interested in efficient housing construction and in certain economies of scale in the extension of water, electricity, and sewage networks to the exclusion of all other considerations. Relocation may have been simply a by-product or derivative of technical and engineering concerns. In the case of Grassy Narrows, it may have seemed very logical and appropriate to the chief engineer of the Kenora Indian Agency that the most efficient

---

<sup>10</sup> Steve Loon, March 12, 1979.

<sup>11</sup> A former Assistant Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs, Cam Mackie, raised the subject of the Grassy Narrows relocation with John McGilp, the Director-General of the Ontario Region in the early 1960's. Mr. McGilp did not have any specific memory of this event, but on the question of a possible "deal" with the Hudson's Bay Co., he admitted that "such an accommodation was entirely possible given the environment at that time". Interview with Cam Mackie, June 26, 1980, Ottawa.

way of providing houses to Indians was to move them all closer to a road, cluster them in what looked like suburban subdivisions, and establish a town similar in layout to any white town. Indeed, this line of reasoning seems to have been operative in DIAND district offices in northern Manitoba and Ontario, and a number of Indian reserves in these regions were relocated in about the same time period as Grassy Narrows.<sup>12</sup>

Although comparative information on other relocations points in the direction of "good intentions" on the part of government officials in extending modern services to isolated Indian communities, the truth about the decision to relocate Grassy Narrows cannot be known. In this case, not only are the facts hard to pin down from the records, but the little information that can be harvested from government sources mysteriously tends to disguise the fact that the resettlement took place. Paradoxically, the absence of evidence tends to lead one to believe that officials

---

12

David Nicholson, former Assistant Deputy Minister in DIAND, consented to an interview on the subject of a relocation with which he was personally familiar. His comments are relevant to the Grassy Narrows experience in the sense that he speaks directly to the policy context of DIAND in the period during which many Indian reserves were relocated. The following is an excerpt from the interview conducted in Ottawa, on July 4, 1980:

"It seems to me that shortly after the Second World War, the plight of Indian people and their conditions was raised in the House of Commons in a Special Parliamentary Committee. It was decided that something had to be done. The delivery of support services by the Department picked up in the early 1950's and grew substantially since then. I would say that the problem of isolated Indian communities, and our ability to provide housing and other services to them in a consistent way, was identified in the late 1950's and 1960's. This brought in resettlement programs.

I can give a particular instance of resettlement from my own experience. Some years ago, I researched the records for a particular Band that was relocated in the early 1960's in northern Manitoba. This was a Band located on the banks of the Seal River, on the border between the Northwest Territories and Manitoba. At that time, the Department was extending services to Indian bands in pretty well all areas - education, housing, community infrastructure, and social services. My research of the correspondence that led up to the decision to relocate the Seal River

of the Department of Indian Affairs conducted the relocation for their own reasons and interests without even considering the relocation to be of any consequence or importance to the Indian people. They simply assumed that the benefits arising from such closer contact with "civilization", and from the experience of "development" would be "good for Indians", since these "children of nature" did not really know what is best for them. The arrogance of officials with the legislative mandate to control and administer the lives of Indians, combined with a lack of understanding of, and respect for, Indian culture determined the outcome not only of the decision to relocate (or not to relocate), but also of the crucial decisions regarding locational choices and spatial form in the new community. We now turn to an examination of the planning process with respect to the physical configuration of the new reserve.

---

Band indicated that the decision had a lot to do with the difficulty of extending such services to remote locations that did not have access by road. The situation of Grassy Narrows seems to be similar. The Seal River reserve was a fly-in situation. During spring break-up and fall freeze-up, there was a period of about six weeks at either end where you couldn't get into the community. You couldn't evacuate people for medical reasons, you couldn't bring in commodities, and so on. In the records I did find a BCR [Band Council Resolution] requesting relocation. In the context of the policy of Indian Affairs at the time relating to our responsibility to deliver services to Indian people, I take it that the people in place in the Department considered the request from the Band as being reasonable and viable in terms of dealing with the problem of how to extend services to a community in a remote and isolated location.

This is how the Seal River Band was relocated to Churchill. It became the Dene Village in the city of Churchill. After the relocation, there was tremendous social upheaval and deterioration, but that's another story."

### Planning the New Community

The paramount issue in planning the new community revolved around the location of houses. According to the Indian Agent, Eric Law, the physical plan prepared by his district officials had the full support of the people of Grassy Narrows and their Band Council. He writes:

"The plans for this community development have been going nicely. We have two new wells and our housing has been planned so that if power becomes available it wouldn't be too costly to supply the people. We have had the full cooperation of the Branch and the Band Council....

In the same letter, Eric Law refers to only two dissenting opinions on the government's locational design:

"...I had a meeting with the people who were to get the new homes, and after explaining the reasons for wanting them to build within the development area, they all agreed but Richard Ashopenace and Pierre Taypaywaykejick..."<sup>13</sup>

Fortunately, a rather extraordinary exchange of correspondence between Band members and government agencies has survived in the old files to shed light on exactly how locational decisions were made. From this correspondence, we find out that there was widespread opposition to the government's "townsite plan"; we discover that the people were very much aware of the adverse consequences that would flow from the implementation of such a plan; and, we have it confirmed that the plan was implemented by coercion and threat. In order to present the case from the point of view of the people of Grassy Narrows, one of these letters will be reproduced exactly as it was found. The handwritten letter, undated, and presumably addressed to the Indian Agent reads like a manifesto on the right to make a choice on where one lives.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup>

Letter from Eric Law to the Honourable W. Benedickson, July 8, 1964.

<sup>14</sup>

This letter was found in file number 29-2-13, DIAND Kenora district files. A letter similar in content was written by Richard Ashopenace to A.G. Leslie, Chief, Agencies Division, DIAND, Headquarters. This letter was dated July 23, 1964. It is unusual that an Indian person from Grassy Narrows, at that point in time, would have written directly to headquarters for redress. This indicates the strength of the feeling of protest against what local officials were doing; it also reflects the felt need to appeal to a higher level of decision-making for intervention on the issue of locational choice.

RICHARD ASHOPENACE

BAND NO. 152

We have rights to live where ever we choose to live or to build a house in the reserve or outside the reserve.

The white man said that when they signed Treaty with the Indians long ago.

Now they won't make the houses where we choose the land, to make the houses in our reserve. Some of the Indian Boys did some cutting brush and trees to clear the places where we choose to make the houses, and they got paid by the Indian Affairs to do that work.

Now they don't want to make the houses on those places.

They want to make the houses about a mile away, from the places we choosed.

They want to make the houses on one spot close together.

We don't like to live so close together for some reasons, toilets and too much drinking and disturbance. The kids see somebody drunk and they want to do the same thing. And we can't do any work around the house like making a garden, too many kids together.

And it will be a long ways to walk to the store too, from the houses. And its no good for health to live close together too.

The Indian Agent Mr. Eric Law, told us if we don't like to live close together with the others, he said we won't get a house, we need the new houses very bad.

So we would like to have our houses build where we want them. We want to live in peace.

This is all for now.

A second set of letters makes fascinating reading because it records one man's determination to challenge the authority of the Indian Agent, Eric Law, to impose locational decisions against the expressed concerns of the Indian people. This correspondence involves two government agencies and three levels of the Indian Affairs bureaucracy.<sup>15</sup> Pierre Taypaywakejick, a 56-year old Indian, asked Norman Schantz to write to the National Parole Board and explain why there was a problem with the relocation. Apparently already in 1964, there was some drinking at the new site. Norman Schantz:

"There are eight houses close together that the government built. This year they are going to build eight more, close to the others, but all the people who paid for the houses wanted them scattered within 1 1/2 mile from the school because of the heavy drinking at the present site.

Also outside toilets all being so close will be a health problem. The Indian Agent said they are going to build them there and 'if you don't want them, we will give the money back, and give [the houses] to someone else'.

Now Pierre would like to know if you could help him to get his house built here close to the mission....Thank you for any help you can give him."<sup>16</sup>

After letters back and forth between the National Parole Board and Indian Affairs, the "official" position of headquarters on locational decisions was stated by A.G. Leslie, Chief, Agencies Division of DIAND in Ottawa:

---

15

This correspondence begins when Norman Schantz and Pierre Taypayway-kejick wrote to David Rempel, the Regional Representative of the National Parole Board in Winnipeg. They wrote to him because Pierre was a parolee, and a condition of his parole was that he abstain from the use of alcohol. Pierre, and many others in the community, wanted to live far away from the concentration of houses where there was drinking. Letters on Pierre's case were then exchanged between Mr. Rempel and Mr. Cook, the Executive Director of the National Parole Board. Mr. Cook wrote to Walter Rudnicki, Chief of the Welfare Division of DIAND, Ottawa. Mr. Rudnicki wrote to A.G. Leslie, Chief, Agencies Division in Ottawa. Mr. Leslie wrote to Mr. Lapp, the Regional Supervisor of Northern Ontario, and Mr. Lapp finally wrote to Eric Law in Kenora.

16

Letter from Norman Schantz to Mr. David Rempel, January 16, 1964.



"It is desired that housing on Indian reserves be on a community planned basis so that all services such as stores, schools, etc. will form part of the housing community. Many times in the past houses have been constructed for the convenience of the individual and when we try to provide roads, water and sewage systems it is a most difficult problem."<sup>17</sup>

Obviously the phrase "on a community planned basis" had a different meaning in the context of DIAND decision-making in the early 1960's, than the idea of community involvement in planning that it might connote in today's lexicon. It is also very clear from the above excerpt that the entire conception of "community planning" revolved exclusively around physical plant (stores, schools, houses) and infrastructure (roads, water and sewage) considerations. Perhaps no one at Indian Affairs even bothered to check out the terrain of the new site for Grassy Narrows. For all the emphasis on the efficiency and economy of providing "water and sewage" to every house, it is ironic that the rock upon which the new reserve is situated makes it impossible to build a community-wide water and sewage system except at an astronomical expense. In the meantime, for the last 20 years, there have been major health problems caused by the proximity of outhouses, as the people had predicted in their letters to government officials.

The case of Pierre Taypaywaykejick was finally decided by Eric Law. In a manner reminiscent of a military commander of an occupation army, Mr. Law decided that he had to "punish" Pierre, not only for wanting to build his house outside of the "development area", but also because Pierre was "organizing resistance" to the government's community plan. He was setting a bad example, inciting others to follow his lead; he was stirring up dissent, mobilizing protest. Mr. Law, in a letter to the Regional Supervisor of DIAND in North Bay, stated that it was "the Chief...[who] does not want all the other band members building outside of the planned community." Therefore, he decided that Pierre would have

---

<sup>17</sup>

Letter from Mr. A.G. Leslie, Chief, Agencies Division, DIAND, Ottawa to Mr. Ward Cook, National Parole Board, June 29, 1964.

to construct his own house, at no cost to Indian Affairs, near the mission where he wanted it. The fact that Pierre would have to pay for his house, when everybody else was being given a house "free" from Indian Affairs, would serve as a deterrent and "help discourage others from wanting to build outside the planned area."<sup>18</sup> The role of Chief Robert Kejick in implementing the government's community plan is still a subject of speculation in the community.<sup>19</sup>

These letters between band members and government officials are important because they give us an insight into the different perspectives on the issue of location and ordering in space. The fact is that the Grassy Narrows people tried to tell the district officials of DIAND that the government's "community plan" violated fundamental precepts of their society. Andy Keewatin:

"If we could have only made the government people listen. We tried to tell them why space was important to us.

The most important thing is that it's from the culture - that's the way our people have always lived. We don't live like the white man, that's not our way. The white man lives close together, but we don't. We like to live far apart, in families. On the old reserve, you knew your place. Everybody respected your place. Nobody didn't build right next to your place....It wasn't private property, but it was a sense of place, your place, your force around you.

---

18

It is difficult to believe that Pierre Taypaywaykejick actively organized resistance to the government's plan. In the mind of Eric Law, however, "he tried to get the other band members to sign that they wanted their houses in that location also." The Mennonite missionary was also seen as a threat to the implementation of the community plan. "Mr. Schantz was using Pierre Taypaywaykejick to split the Band...." In any case, Pierre would have to build his house at his own expense; for the \$50 that he paid to DIAND, he would receive only housing materials. All this is contained in a letter dated July 8, 1964, from Eric Law to Mr. Lapp, Regional Supervisor in North Bay.

19

Is it significant, for example, that Robert Kejick was awarded a government job by Eric Law after the relocation? Mr. Kejick is the only Grassy Narrows band member to have a permanent civil service appointment. He does not live on the reserve but resides in Kenora.

And another thing. When you have the space, you have a better chance to look after yourself, to be independent.

As soon as they started to bunch us up, the problems started, the drinking, the violence. This has a lot to do with being all bunched up."<sup>20</sup>

Many people resisted the concentration in space that was the key element in the development plan for the new reserve.<sup>21</sup> The other major problem was access to water:

"We wanted the houses closer to the water when we were to move to the new reserve. But the Indian Agent wanted the houses further away from the shoreline and much closer together because he said that we would not need to walk to get water. We were promised water and sewage."<sup>22</sup>

As a result of the disregard by DIAND officials for the Indians' concerns over water, some houses were cut off from access to the lake by other houses standing in the way. Other families had to walk a fair distance to get to the lake. In this respect, the government's plan violated another cardinal precept of the traditional Ojibwa ways of organizing space, namely, equality of access on the part of all families to life-supporting resources. On the old reserve, every family had its own path to lake water and, "everybody could get to the water without

---

<sup>20</sup> Andy Keewatin, January 5, 1979.

<sup>21</sup> According to Norman Schantz, the Fobister, Beaver, and Pahpasay families strongly opposed the location of their houses next to each other in the center of the new reserve. They told Indian Affairs that they wanted to live far apart from each other. Indian Affairs refused their request, and told them to move back to the houses in the center that had already been constructed. The Indian Agent kept telling the Indians that the new reserve was going to be a "model community". Some families hated to move from the old reserve so much that they resisted entirely. Tom Payash held out the longest; he and his family moved to the new reserve in 1972.

<sup>22</sup> Art Assin, March 27, 1979.

crossing anybody else's place".<sup>23</sup> In that the entire locational plan for housing rested on the critical assumption that every house would have running water, it is not surprising that the Grassy Narrows people feel bitter about the fact that they were crowded and that "all this...has been for nothing." Even more painful to some than the loss of space and access to water was the physical and spiritual separation from the English-Wabigoon river. The new site was not on the river but on a stagnant and lifeless lake.

"The people...they just hated to move to the new reserve. They wanted to be near fresh, flowing water, near their river. Garden Lake, where the government put the new reserve, was just a small lake. It was not The River. It was not A Living Thing.

Even after they moved to the new reserve, some people kept going back to their houses on the old reserve. They just couldn't stand it on the new reserve."<sup>24</sup>

Maggie Land describes her feeling about the new reserve very well:

"I don't want to live here. Just a small lake. There - we had open water, fresh water, our river. Just like you get out of a cage when you go from here to the old reserve."<sup>25</sup>

The consequences of the kind of community planning that was done within the Department of Indian Affairs at the time of the Grassy Narrows relocation are now reflected in the words that the people use to describe their community. They call it a "concentration camp". They feel crowded, impounded, imprisoned, and reduced to the status of animals herded into a corral:

---

<sup>23</sup> Andy Keewatin, January 5, 1979.

<sup>24</sup> Norman Schantz, October, 1978.

<sup>25</sup> Maggie Land, November 26, 1978.

"An Indian man from Grassy Narrows once was telling me about the new reserve, and the bunch of houses that the government had built. He said, 'when you have a bunch of cattle, it's better to have a corral to feed them...the government built this corral which is the new reserve. Now, you might as well throw in the food, so that they can get it. This food is the welfare that the government is giving us. But I say, if you're corraled like that, well, you might as well live and act like cattle.'"<sup>26</sup>

Archie Land uses the same metaphor in his description of the new reserve:

"I was born and raised at Grassy Narrows and was here when the reserve was moved... people became very disappointed with the new reserve. It's because they didn't choose to live here. Government choosed it. How much land we got here? As far as I'm concerned, the community here, it's too close together, it's too close. Far apart, there would be no trouble...

Right now, what's happening is that we are corraled like cattle. We're not cattle. Are you cattle?"<sup>27</sup>

It is difficult not to come to the conclusion that the Department of Indian Affairs is morally and socially responsible for the situation in the contemporary community. The physical layout of houses, the sense of order in space dictated by the standards and values of the dominant society, has had a profound and negative influence on community life. Kai Erikson made the following observation about Grassy Narrows:

"Village compounds of the type supplied by the government have traditionally been suited to the needs and values of an agricultural people, and they violate the sense of space customary not only to the Ojibwa people in particular, but to hunting and gathering people everywhere.

---

<sup>26</sup> Father Lacelle, April 3, 1979.

<sup>27</sup> Archie Land, February 4, 1979.

For one thing, [the village compound] disrupts old ways of relating to the land, to nature, and to the idea of communal ownership of natural resources. For another, it compresses space in such a manner that traditional ways of relating to other people no longer work.

Every people, every culture, has its own sense of how much distance should be maintained between neighbors, how wide a margin of privacy is necessary to protect individuality; and when that sense of spacing is changed by circumstance, the almost ironical result is that neighborliness breaks down. When people are pressed together too closely, they can become more distant emotionally and spiritually: hostilities and aggressions, once insulated by a cushion of space, now fill the narrow gaps like a kind of electricity....

Grassy Narrows has become not only a tight concentration of people but a tight concentration of troubles."<sup>28</sup>

With this discussion of the processes of planning and decision-making within DIAND with respect to the Grassy Narrows relocation, we have come full circle in our inquiry into what happened to a way of life. Our purpose was not primarily to establish culpability on the part of the federal government for the effects of its policies; rather, it seemed important to show how the prevailing ethic of community planning, and the standard operating procedures within the Indian Affairs bureaucracy, mitigated against alternative paths to "modernization" whose outcomes might have been less devastating to the cultural integrity of an indigenous people. It was very hard, even for individuals of conscience, to challenge the "system" that gave Indian Agents sweeping powers over the lives of Indians.

---

28

Kai Erikson, "Memorandum to the People of Grassy Narrows". The above excerpt is from the first draft of a report that Kai Erikson and Christopher Vecsey prepared for the Band Council following their visit to the reserve in January, 1979.

A DIAND staff member who once worked in the Kenora office stated the case very well:

"As a civil servant, your exclusive obligation was to your boss, to the Department of Indian Affairs. Indian people didn't count. They were just 'wards of the state'. To be someone of conscience, with a feeling of responsibility to Indian people, was to ask for an uphill struggle in keeping body and soul together on the job. It was like that for me."<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup>

Vince Webb, June 25, 1979, in Toronto.

## CONCLUSION TO PART II

When the people of Grassy Narrows abandoned their old reserve almost two decades ago and resettled on a new site chosen for them by government officials, they did not know at the time that they would be traversing a distance far greater than the five miles that separated them physically from their old habitat. Some objected to the new location on the grounds that the land there was not blessed and therefore was spiritually unfit for human settlement. Others warned that the new land was not productive and that the soil could not support family gardens. Still others lamented the fact that they would be separated physically and spiritually from the life-giving waters of the English-Wabigoon river on which they had been resident for many generations. Yet, in spite of their apprehensions and presentiments, some moved to the new site because they were attracted by the benefits of a road, electrical power, schools, and medical care that the government promised to them; others moved because they had to, because they had no choice.

Disillusionment with the conditions at the new site, however, was not long in coming. The people found out that they could no longer live in the way that they had always lived, in family groups separated in space. They discovered they had no choice in the location of their dwellings. They had warned government officials about the dangers inherent in the crowding and in the compression of space beyond the limits that had been worked out through custom and usage during centuries of occupation. The people's initial misgivings about the site and the layout of dwellings, however, went unheeded. In symbolic terms, the Grassy Narrows people could not locate themselves on the new reserve, for they had left a world that corresponded to their understanding of themselves, and of their place within it, and entered one that did not. In the end, the integration of their beliefs, concepts, and practices with observable and non-observable reality would be shattered under the impact of an entirely foreign and non-compatible way of life imposed upon them by a Government operating under the best of intentions.



The full measure of the effect of the policies of the Government of Canada with respect to its native people is illustrated by this case study of the relocation of Grassy Narrows. Within the Department of Indian Affairs, relocation was perceived as a means to an end, a necessary adjunct to a broader mandate to deliver services to Indian people. Its officials did not consider the relocation important enough to warrant documentation and only a few cryptic letters on this subject remain in the files. For the older people of Grassy Narrows, however, the relocation came to represent a watershed in their lives. They date the beginning of the end of their world from this event. In one generation, they experienced all the central institutions of the old culture, and all the pivotal beliefs and values of the old way of life, being rendered impotent, useless, and superfluous under the conditions of the new reserve.

The failure on the part of government officials to comprehend what they were doing, to assess the longer-term consequences of their actions, and even to speculate on the possibility that the Indian people "might have something to lose" in being wrenched out of their way of life has deep roots in our way of thinking about the world. In Western industrial society, the polarity of the concepts of "nature" and "culture" is so ingrained that we are no longer conscious of the extent to which our notions of development and progress rest upon the idea of "culture" as something we have created or constructed. "Nature", on the other hand, is the opposite of culture. It must be tamed, subdued, controlled, or conquered. This division between nature and culture permeates our thinking as to what is civilized and uncivilized. Because the native people are considered to be closer to nature, they are by definition just beyond the reach of "culture". Since in their condition, they cannot know what is best for them, they have to be brought out of the darkness and shown the light. In order to move from nature to culture, they must be subjected to our schools, religion, housing, money, jobs, conveniences, and social services for these constitute the very hallmarks of our

civilization. The move from nature to culture constitutes progress. Economic progress is made when nature is transformed into resources, while social progress is made when the primitive are drawn into civilization.<sup>1</sup>

This attitude demeans the very core of Indians as human beings, for it suggests that the Indian people had no "culture" before contact with the white man: no effective system of human relationships; no ordered conceptions of the universe; no values, standards, norms or ideals for human behaviour; no frame of reference in time or space to order and coordinate human activity; and, no real motivations for livelihood and the satisfaction of basic human needs. And yet, if the story contained in the preceding pages tells us anything at all, it is that the Indian people not only had a culture that met all the above specifications, but that this culture had survived until it was finally, and perhaps irrevocably, undermined by government intervention.

What happened to the Indian people at Grassy Narrows as a result of being placed in a situation that made a mockery of their culture is reminiscent of what happens to individuals, irrespective of their race or creed, when they suddenly find themselves in an environment where familiar objects, relationships, and orientations are transformed. Victims of natural disasters, for example, suffer acute bewilderment and confusion when well-known landmarks of their life are suddenly wiped out by a flood, tornado, or earthquake.<sup>2</sup> Victims of "culture shock" also find themselves unable to cope with an environment in which familiar psychological cues that normally help an individual function in society are

---

1

Hugh Brody makes this point eloquently in speaking about the current attitude towards resource development in the Canadian north. He warns that government officials continue to think of progress for Inuit and Eskimo people as a linear movement from nature into culture. Hugh Brody, "An Overview", A paper submitted to the Berger Inquiry in the hearings on the MacKenzie Valley Pipeline, April 1976, pp. 18-19.

2

For a superb essay on the consequences of a natural disaster on a community, see Kai Erikson, Everything in Its Path (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976).

suddenly withdrawn and replaced with new ones that are strange and incomprehensible.<sup>3</sup> Refugees, uprooted from an altogether different life and cast adrift in a society that they barely understand, also experience disorganization, feelings of helplessness, and a numbness of the spirit. If all retreat to a more familiar physical, social, or cultural landscape is cut off, and if the rate of change is accelerated beyond the point that people can cope, the trauma is doubly severe. In this sense, the rate of change has important implications apart from, and is as important as, the direction of change.<sup>4</sup>

These examples of shock tell us something about the conditions under which individuals experience what has been termed "adaptive breakdown" and how such breakdown is manifest. The common symptoms are as follows: subjective feelings of loss of capacity; helplessness in the face of conditions over which one has no control; a sense of personal worthlessness because one's labour is insignificant; disorientation and confusion in the absence of fixed moral landmarks and accepted social values; apathy, emotional and intellectual withdrawal; retreat into dependency; susceptibility to anxiety, rage, and depression; a heightened apprehension about the physical and social environment; and, a numbness of the spirit.

One can find these symptoms whenever people feel abandoned, left out of things, separated from the life around them. Individuals show one or more of these symptoms when they are forced to grapple with unfamiliar and unpredictable events which they cannot explain and over which they

---

<sup>3</sup> "Culture shock" is a term that has come into conventional usage. Its symptoms have been described by Sven Lundstedt, "Personality Determinants and Assessment", Journal of Social Issues, July 1963.

<sup>4</sup> The proposition that the acceleration of change has also become an elemental force in our own society, and that the rate of change is an independent variable with far-reaching personal and social effects, is forcefully argued by Alvin Toffler, in Future Shock (New York: Random House Inc., 1970).

have no control; when cultural orientations that they have been brought up with no longer serve to interpret reality; when habitual actions no longer have the same meaning or effect; when psychological cues no longer serve to structure experience; and, when social and moral values are rendered impotent in organizing work or in sustaining human relationships. Under such conditions, life itself becomes meaningless.

At Grassy Narrows, not an individual, but an entire generation, indeed an entire society has lived under such conditions since the relocation. The community today is formed of a deeply traumatized people. The reserve is a no-man's land. The people there have been subjected to too much change in too short a time, and the direction of this change has been downward in both a spiritual and a social sense. The people there are no longer hunters, trappers, and fishermen, and yet they are far from absorbed into the productive processes of the nation; they no longer live in an Ojibwa community, yet they are far from accepted into the social fabric of the country; they no longer follow the proud cultural traditions of earlier generations, and yet they have found no replacements for them in our own culture. They have become as a result an extraordinarily vulnerable people who have neither the integrity of the old way of life nor the security of new ways to help guide succeeding generations through an uncertain future.

They are not alone. Theirs is a problem of all people who have been dispossessed, displaced, disinherited, and entrapped between two modes of existence.

PART THREE

RIVER OF POISON

### INTRODUCTION TO PART III

Pijibowin is the Ojibwa word for poison. It is used by the people of Grassy Narrows to describe the mercury that now contaminates their sacred English-Wabigoon river. Between 1962 and 1970, Dryden Chemicals Limited, a pulp and paper mill located about eighty miles upstream from Grassy Narrows, dumped over 20,000 pounds of mercury into the river system as effluent from its chlor-alkali plant. By March 1970, when the Ontario Minister of Energy and Resource Management ordered the company to stop discharging mercury into the environment, the damage was complete and irreversible. Over three hundred miles of the English-Wabigoon river system with all its biological life would remain poisoned for a period of seventy to one hundred years.

An environmental disaster can be assessed in many ways. One can measure the sheer force of the impact, the extent of the damage, the effects on human health, the economic losses sustained, or the length of recovery time. Any major disruptive event, however, should also be judged by looking at the vulnerability of the people who are exposed to it. A community that has just experienced a breakdown in traditional patterns of settlement and in a way of life will suffer much more acutely the effects of yet another crisis. In such a situation, environmental contamination can no longer be measured in isolation for its impact interacts in a complex manner with previous impacts to form a pattern of cumulative injury.

Coming only a few years after the relocation, the discovery of mercury in 1970 dealt another blow to the community of Grassy Narrows. Having just been wrenched out of their moorings in the old reserve way of life, the people were ill-prepared to cope with yet another misfortune. They had but a precarious hold on the conditions of their existence on the new reserve. They could no longer draw strength either from their

relationship to the land or from the well of their faith that had once given meaning and coherence to their lives. In the context of their traditional religious beliefs, the contamination of the river could only be interpreted as a punishment from the Great Spirit for some serious violation of the laws governing man's relationship to nature. People had great difficulty comprehending this "unseen poison" of mercury whose presence in the water and in the fish they could not detect or taste or feel. They could not understand how something that happened so far away from them (in Dryden) could hurt them. In their heart, many could not believe that the natural environment that had nurtured them and anchored them in both the spiritual and the material sense could suddenly betray them. To accept the fact that their "River of Life" had turned into a river of poison meant to lose forever the sense of security in Nature and in the source of life itself.

In the community, the suspicion of pijibowin and the loss of control over one's environment ran like a strong undercurrent beneath the tangible and measurable effects of the contamination. The tangible effects, the disruption in guiding, the loss of commercial fishing, the warnings against taking fish for food, struck a further blow to the people's ability to produce their own food and make an independent living from the resources of the land. Just as important, however, were the intangible impacts, the massive intrusion of outsiders, the confusion and misunderstanding about the effects on human health that resulted from the political manipulation of the mercury issue, and the acceleration of the rate of intervention by Government in community life. Far from being "just" a medical and an economic problem, the contamination of the river by mercury became a serious social problem. The way in which the Governments of Canada and Ontario handled the mercury issue, the exploitation of the Grassy Narrows people by self-seeking groups and individuals, was in the end as severely demoralizing as the fact of the poison itself. The

analysis of the impacts of this environmental disaster, therefore, has to be grounded in the relationship of the Indian people to the Canadian society as a whole. Indeed, the way in which the mercury issue was defined, managed, and politicized mirrors much of what is dreadfully wrong with our own society.

Part III examines the nature of mercury poisoning and its effects on the people of Grassy Narrows in the context of the complex structure of Indian-White relations. While there is no way to measure with any degree of precision how much of the current crisis in this community is attributable to mercury and how much is due to the breakdown of a way of life, the people's own perception of the importance of mercury is significant. They speak of mercury poisoning as the event that pushed them over the edge of their ability to feel security in Nature, to relate to each other and to the world around them, and to be self-reliant in terms of providing for their material needs. They call mercury "the last nail in the coffin."



Chapter 10.

"THE LAST NAIL IN THE COFFIN": THE POISONING OF THE RIVER

BY METHYL MERCURY

Background: The Nature of the Poison and its Effects

The "liquid silver" described by Aristotle in the fourth century before Christ has long been known for its uses and its hazards. Its ore, cinnabar, was used to make the red dye found in pre-historic cave paintings in Europe. During Roman times, the heavy metal of mercury was used to purify gold and silver. Greek physicians used it as a medical aid in the first century, A.D. Throughout history, the risks to human health in mining the metal were also well-known. The miners developed violent tremors, muscular spasms, and character disorders before they died. The Romans therefore used convicts and slaves to mine the metal and this precedent of using forced labour was followed by the Spaniards in the mercury mines they developed in the New World. Miners, however, were not the only ones susceptible to the toxic effects of exposure to mercury. In the eighteenth century, a physician called Ramazzini wrote that goldsmiths using mercury in their craft,

"...very soon become subject to vertigo, asthma and paralysis. Very few of them reach old age, and even when they do not die young, their health is so terribly undermined that they pray for death."<sup>1</sup>

Of mirror-makers who used mercury to coat the backs of mirrors, he wrote:

"You can see these workmen scowling and gazing reluctantly in their mirrors at the reflection of their own suffering and cursing the trade they have adopted."<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Bernardino Ramazzini, 1731 A.D., as quoted in Warner Troyer, No Safe Place, (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company Limited, 1977), p. ix.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in "Mercury and Its Compounds", Occupational Health Bulletin, volume 25 (1970).

The expression "mad as a hatter" grew out of the observation of tremors, manic-depressive behaviour, and temperamental instability among hatters who used mercuric nitrate to improve the felting quality of wool and fur. In short, the toxic and potentially fatal effects of working with metallic or inorganic mercury have been well-established in recorded history.

Today, mercury and its compounds are used in about three thousand industrial processes by over eighty industries. Mercury is used in the making of dental fillings, in paints, electronic controls, thermometers, disinfectants, preservatives, and lotions. Mercury is a catalyst in many metallurgical processes; it is used in the production of vinyl chloride which is a component in the manufacture of plastics. The single most important use of mercury is in chlor-alkali plants that serve the pulp and paper industry. Here, mercury is used in the electrolytic production of caustic soda and chlorine, and it is this industry that "loses" mercury in great volume both in waste water and through exhaust gases.<sup>3</sup> Individual cases of mercury poisoning arising from working with mercury in industry have been documented.<sup>4</sup> However, it took the massive epidemic

---

3

Data on the volume of mercury emissions in Canada by industrial use for 1970 show that the chlor-alkali industry "loses" about 32.1% of the total volume of mercury losses from all industries. Inadvertent emissions of mercury from petroleum combustion constitute about 24.3% of the total. All other uses, including paints, dental amalgams, instrumentation and electrical equipment, print manufacture, battery cathodes, pharmaceuticals, fungicides, and the recovery of gold, zinc, copper, and lead make up the remainder of total emissions of mercury. Total emissions of mercury into the atmosphere in 1970 have been documented as 74.6 metric tons.

Environment Canada, National Inventory of Sources and Emissions of Mercury (1970): Internal Report APCD 73-6, 1973. See also:

Azzaria, L.M. and F. Habashi, "Mercury Pollution - An Examination of Some Basic Issues", CIM Bulletin (August 1976), pp. 101-107.

4

In the province of Ontario between 1955-1975, for example, the Workmen's Compensation Board paid compensation to twenty-two workers who developed mercury poisoning. These cases were found in the following industries: hat manufacturing; gold refining; fungicides; battery manufacturing; and the electrical industry. Other cases developed from working with mercury in a dental laboratory, and from inhaling mercury vapour during firefighting. Two other cases of poisoning involved workers exposed to mercury in a chlor-alkali plant. It is inorganic mercury that is most often responsible for mercury poisoning among industrial workers. Troyer, No Safe Place, p. 10.

of poisoning in Minamata, Japan in the late 1950's and 1960's to shake the world out of its complacency about the dangers of discharging mercury as industrial waste.

Minamata is a village of about 40,000 persons, located on a bay of the Shiranui Sea, on the southernmost island of Japan, Kyushu. Its inhabitants make their living by commercial fishing, by tourism, and by working in the giant petrochemical complex that is the Chisso Corporation. The town is associated with "Minamata Disease", a killer that took one hundred and seven lives and by 1970, left over a thousand people with irreversible neurological damage, crippled limbs, blindness, paralysis, internal disorders, and loss of functions. The disease fell most heavily on the poorest people of the area who were most dependent on a steady diet of fish and shellfish.

Signs of the poison appeared in 1950 when fish in the bay began to float to the surface, swim erratically and thrash about wildly before dying. Two years later, cats began to leap up in the air and turn in feverish circles, like whirling dervishes, before dying. People called it "the cat dancing disease". In April 1956, two victims of what first appeared to be cerebral palsy were admitted to the Chisso Factory Hospital. By mid-summer, so many similar cases had been reported that the Director of the Hospital, Dr. Hosokawa, declared that "an unclarified disease" of the nervous system had broken out. By the autumn of that year, a research team of the Kumamoto University Medical School suspected that the mass poisoning was traceable to a heavy metal concentrated in the flesh of fish and shellfish taken from Minamata Bay. It took years of research to identify methyl mercury as the cause of the disaster and to provide conclusive evidence that the source of the poison was the effluent from the chemical plant of the Chisso Corporation. Indeed, a full decade passed before enough evidence could be accumulated to establish the legal liability, on the part of Chisso, for the damages caused by industrial pollution. The Company's executives refused to cooperate with the scientists, continued to dump mercury as effluent until 1968, and used the Company's considerable economic and political

influence to stifle criticism and frustrate the research effort.<sup>5</sup> In the end the Company paid compensation to the victims of Minamata Disease, but the cost in human life was staggering. Indeed it is estimated that, aside from the actual and potential cases of congenital mercury poisoning, the number of Minamata Disease victims may yet exceed 10,000 because of the long-term effects of past exposure.

Although other outbreaks of mercury poisoning occurred elsewhere, the disease is always associated with the Minamata experience.<sup>6</sup> In the Minamata case, there was a thorough investigation of the causal links between inorganic mercury dumped as industrial waste, the contamination of the marine food chain by methyl mercury, and the onset of clinical symptoms of poisoning in man caused by the ingestion of mercury-contaminated fish. The process of transformation of inorganic (or metallic) mercury into the much more toxic form of organic (methyl) mercury occurs when inorganic mercury, dumped as industrial waste, settles into the sediment bottom of a body of water.<sup>7</sup> There it is "methylated" by a tiny micro-

---

5

In 1969, attorneys representing disease victims came to see Dr. Hosokawa, who had retired as the Director of the Chisso Factory Hospital. He was very ill and dying, but he made a sworn statement that in 1959, he informed Chisso executives that his research had demonstrated a direct link between Chisso effluent discharges and Minamata disease. In response to this information, management stopped him from doing any further research and clamped down on scientists trying to take samples of the effluent water. In public and during the court case, the Company continued to deny that it had any previous knowledge of the link between its chemical operations and Minamata Disease.

6

In 1956, 1960, and 1971-72 there were outbreaks of mercury poisoning in Iraq where seed grain treated with mercury to prevent spoilage was diverted and milled for flour. Smaller outbreaks caused by eating mercury-treated seed grain occurred in Guatemala (1963-65), Ghana (1967) and Pakistan (1969). In 1964 in Niigata, Japan, 120 persons died from eating poisoned fish and shell-fish in an outbreak similar to Minamata.

7

Structurally, organic mercury differs from inorganic mercury through the addition of one or more carbon atoms to the mercury atom. Both types are toxic although inorganic mercury does not do as much damage when taken by mouth. It is not as readily absorbed by the body; and, it is much more easily expelled from the body. Unlike methyl mercury, inorganic mercury does not concentrate in the body's vital organs and in the brain.

organism identified as "methano- bacterium omelanskii".<sup>8</sup> The transformed mercury is then absorbed by microscopic underwater life such as plankton or algae which serve as food for insect larvae. The insects are consumed by little fish; the little fish are consumed by bigger fish; and in this manner, the burden of methyl mercury in fish increases in concentration and toxicity as it passes up the food chain. Once inorganic mercury has been added to a water system, it takes a very long time for the mercury to clear the system. Scientists estimate that only about one per cent of the sediment's burden of inorganic mercury is bio-methylated into methyl mercury each year. As a result, the process of contamination of marine life is continuous, persistent, and long-lasting.

Of the two kinds of mercury, organic mercury is more dangerous to human beings, and methyl mercury is the most toxic form of organic mercury. Methyl mercury is carried by blood through body tissues and to the brain. The mercury also concentrates in certain organs, like the heart, intestine, liver, and kidneys. It is in the brain, however, that it does the greatest damage and most of the clinical symptoms of mercury poisoning are related to brain and nerve lesions.<sup>9</sup> In the brain, the methyl mercury destroys cells in the cerebellum, which regulates balance, and in the cortex, which influences vision. It also finds its way to other regions of the brain like the frontal lobe, where it may cause

---

8

The process of bio-methylation was described in 1967 by two Swedish scientists working at the Institute of Analytical Chemistry at the University of Stockholm. S. Jensen and A. Jernelev authored a paper "Biological Methylation of Mercury in Aquatic Organisms", which documented how biomethylation works. In Canada, a controversy still rages as to "when" Canadian scientists were made aware of biomethylation and the dangers of polluting waterways with inorganic mercury.

9

A complete description of the type and distribution of lesions in the human brain caused by methyl mercury can be found in: D. Hunter and D. Russell, "Focal Cerebral and Cerebellar Atrophy in a Human Subject due to Organic Mercury Compounds", Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery and Psychiatry, 17 (1954) pp. 235-241; and, T. Takeuchi, "Biological Reactions and Pathological Changes in Human Beings and Animals Caused by Organic Mercury Contamination", in R. Hartung and B.D. Dinman (eds.), Environmental Mercury Contamination (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ann Arbor Science Publishers, 1972).

disturbances in personality. The most complete assessment of mercury poisoning can only be made at autopsy. The clinical symptoms of chronic mercury poisoning are not very specific and may be simulated by alcoholism, diabetes, severe nutritional deficiencies, and other diseases of the central nervous system. Post-mortem studies of the brains of the victims of mercury poisoning in Minamata Japan, however, have revealed a marked atrophy or shrinkage of the brain caused by the destruction of nerve cells; the remaining nerve-cell tissue was characterized by a "sponge-like" quality.

The clinical symptoms of "Minamata Disease", of poisoning by methyl mercury, include: paresthesia (numbness) of the mouth, lips, tongue, hands, and feet (also called "glove and stocking" sensory disturbance); concentric constriction of the visual field (tunnel vision), sometimes accompanied by abnormal blindspots and nystagmus (disturbances in eye movement/abnormal oscillation of the eyeball); impairment of hearing; dysarthria (speech disorders) and difficulty in swallowing; ataxia (loss of balance, a stumbling, awkward gait, clumsiness in handling familiar objects, disturbances in co-ordination); loss of memory, inability to recall basic things like the alphabet, loss of the ability to concentrate, apathy, feelings of extreme fatigue; mental depression, emotional instability, and, a tendency to fits of anxiety and rage. These initial symptoms of mercury poisoning may lead eventually to severe disability, to uncontrollable tremors and convulsions, to deformity, paralysis, coma, and death. There are no remedies or therapy for the victims of mercury poisoning. The disease is considered to be irreversible and incurable.

Aside from these dreadful symptoms, methyl mercury has other characteristics that make it a particularly insidious poison. In the first place, methyl mercury has a special affinity for unborn children. In the body of a pregnant woman, not only is the mercury immediately passed from the placenta to the fetus, but the fetus actually concentrates the lethal toxin. In Minamata, there were many cases of infants born with what seemed like cerebral palsy; some had deformed limbs, showed uncontrollable muscle spasms, and often were seriously mentally retarded. These were the congenital victims of Minamata Disease who had acquired the poison prenatally from the mother. Post-mortem studies of such children demonstrated

massive atrophy in brain size and weight and underdeveloped and malformed tissues in the central nervous system.<sup>10</sup>

In the second place, methyl mercury is a poison that follows no specific timetable between the time of exposure and the onset of symptoms of neurological damage. The damage done to the brain in one year may not be manifest until several years later. Individuals have different tolerances for the substance as well; some are so sensitive to methyl mercury that even very brief exposure to contaminated food can create significant injury.<sup>11</sup> In addition, mercury continues to affect brain cells even after a person has stopped eating contaminated food. It has what is called a "half-life" of at least 70 days in the human blood, and perhaps 120 days or more in the brain.<sup>12</sup> This means that after 70 days, half of the burden of methyl mercury (ingested through fish, for example) still exists in the body; it takes another 70 days to eliminate half of the remaining burden, and the balance is halved again every 70 days.<sup>13</sup> Brain damage, however, can be caused by minute amounts of mercury. There exist no

---

<sup>10</sup>

Researchers in Japan found that concentrations of methyl mercury in red blood cells of infants at birth averaged about 30% higher than those of the mother. Often, the mothers of congenital victims of Minamata Disease did not show any manifestations of mercury poisoning. The brains of infants who received mercury prenatally from the mother and subsequently died from the poison were found to be substantially below "normal" size and weight. The "normal" weight for an infant of two years of age is about 960 grams; for an infant three years of age, about 1,125; Minamata disease victims at age two and three registered brain weight of 650 and 630 grams, respectively. Troyer, No Safe Place, p. 236.

<sup>11</sup>

For example, in Niigata, Japan a young boy who ate large amounts of contaminated fish and shellfish over a period of only ten days in 1953 was, seven years later, so severely affected by the poison that he could not attend school. He had no recall of the alphabet and could not learn it again. Department of National Health and Welfare Canada, Task Force on Organic Mercury in the Environment: Final Report (1973), p. 6.

<sup>12</sup>

No one really knows for certain what the "half-life" of methyl mercury is in the brain. Japanese researchers suggest that the half-life of mercury in the brain may be as long as 120 days. Further work is necessary to clarify this issue.

<sup>13</sup>

The half-life sequence in the expulsion of mercury from the human body is only operative, of course, when people at risk stop eating mercury-contaminated food, and stop adding to the burden of mercury in their body. A continuing diet of contaminated fish, for example, prolongs indefinitely the expulsion of the poison from the body's vital organs and brain.

scientific procedures to determine individual vulnerability to specific amounts of the toxin. Moreover, some individuals seem to have a longer retention period for the poison than others. Thus, there are no guarantees that people exposed to low-level doses of mercury over a long period of time will escape Minamata Disease; and, there are no assurances that cases of low-grade or sub-acute poisoning will always remain so. Indeed, in Minamata, some cases diagnosed initially as long-term and chronic cases of low-level mercury poisoning developed symptoms of acute Minamata Disease several years later. Much more is known about the effects of large-dose high concentrations of mercury in the human body than about the effects of low-level exposure over longer periods of time. Since the early symptoms of Minamata Disease are also observed for other conditions, like alcoholism, diabetes, and cervical spondylosis, it is difficult to make a positive diagnosis of methyl mercury poisoning.<sup>14</sup>

The measurement of "the body burden" of methyl mercury and the correlation of such findings with neurological signs have presented scientists with many technical problems, including the use of different units and differences in interpretation among different laboratories. Although the criteria of "safe" levels of mercury in a person's blood vary among countries, there is a general consensus that the amount of mercury in the blood (the body burden of mercury) is definitely correlated with the potential health risk that a person bears. Amounts of mercury in the blood are indicated by a ratio of mercury to whole blood, in parts per billion (ppb). The "normal" level of mercury in blood is considered to be below 20 ppb; for non-fish eaters, the norm in Canada is below 5 ppb.

---

14

Other factors also mitigate against the early diagnosis of mercury poisoning. During the period when blood levels of mercury are rising, no signs or symptoms are apparent. People ingesting mercury through contaminated food experience no unpleasantness in taste, changes in colour, or any other adverse qualities. For this reason, people can take in a lethal amount of mercury in a short period, without any indications whatsoever that they are in fact taking in a poison.

Further, one of the early symptoms of poisoning, paresthesia or numbness, has what doctors call "a high background frequency" in some populations. Complaints of the "pins and needles" sensation in the hands and feet do not necessarily indicate the first effect of mercury poisoning; this sensation may be due to a variety of causes other than methyl mercury.



Health officials in Canada, U.S.A., Sweden, Finland, and Japan accept 100 ppb of mercury to whole blood as the "safe" level. Other countries recognize 200 ppb as a "safe" level. The 200 ppb figure is based on the lowest level in the Japanese data associated with symptoms.

Due to individual variations in tolerance of mercury and in length of the retention period, it has been very difficult to establish with precision the relationship between blood concentrations of mercury and the incidence of symptoms of Minamata Disease. Although the Japanese experience is relevant to the Canadian context in the sense that methyl mercury was transmitted through the ingestion of contaminated fish, unfortunately blood concentrations of Minamata Disease victims were not fully documented at the time of intoxication. In order to be able to understand the possible significance of the mercury levels found in the blood of the people of Grassy Narrows, it is useful to review the correlation between such levels and the incidence of symptoms documented for other outbreaks of mercury poisoning. Useful data in this connection are available from Iraq and are reproduced as Table III:1.<sup>15</sup> The data show that symptoms of poisoning begin to appear when individuals carry between 500 and 1000 ppb of mercury in blood. Yet, it is worth repeating that very little is known about the long-term effects of even very modest concentrations of mercury in the human brain.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup>

Iraq had three outbreaks of organic mercury poisoning, two of which were major. In 1960, approximately 1000 persons were affected, and in 1971 and 1972, 6,430 cases were recorded, of which 459 were fatal. The 1971-72 outbreak followed the ingestion of bread made from grain treated with a methyl mercurial fungicide. The symptoms of poisoning were similar to those found in Minamata. In this most recent case in Iraq, blood samples were taken at an average of 65 days after the cessation of ingestion of mercury.

<sup>16</sup>

In Japan, some individuals developed initial clinical symptoms of mercury poisoning at blood levels close to 200 ppb; in Sweden, chromosome breakage was observed at the 400 ppb level. Autopsies have also shown some brain damage in individuals whose exposure to methyl mercury was considered insufficient to provoke actual symptoms. Generally, however, it has been estimated that "fully-developed" intoxication by methyl mercury occurs when the concentration of mercury in blood is in the range of 1230 to 1840 ppb. (The normal range is 5 to 20 ppb.) B.D. Dinman and L.H. Hecker, "The Dose-Response Relationship Resulting from Exposure to Alkyl Mercury Compounds", in Environmental Mercury Contamination, p. 290.

TABLE III:1

RELATION OF CLINICAL SYMPTOMS OF METHYL MERCURY POISONING IN IRAQ  
TO WHOLE-BLOOD LEVELS OF MERCURY

<u>Whole-blood methyl mercury concentra- tion levels (ppb)</u>	<u>Incidence of Symptoms (%)</u>					
	<u>Pares- thesia</u>	<u>Ataxia</u>	<u>Visual Changes</u>	<u>Dys- arthria</u>	<u>Hearing Defects</u>	<u>Death</u>
0 - 100	9.5	5	0	5	0	0
101 - 500	5	0	0	5	0	0
501 - 1000	42	11	21	5	5	0
1001 - 2000	60	47	53	24	0	0
2001 - 3000	79	60	56	25	12.5	0
3001 - 4000	82	100	58	75	36	17
4001 - 5000	100	100	83	85	66	28

The data from Iraq show that the range of 0 to 100 ppb of mercury in whole blood is associated with a 9.5% incidence of paresthesia (numbness in the extremities) and a 5% incidence of ataxia (stumbling gait) and dysarthria (slurred speech). Medical authorities concluded, however, that at this concentration, the symptoms were probably caused by factors other than methyl mercury.

The next range 101-500 ppb is associated with incidences of paresthesia and dysarthria of 5%. Above this range, the incidence of symptoms increases in direct proportion to the concentration of mercury in blood, until concentrations exceeding 3000 ppb are associated with death.

The question arises whether the Iraqi data are relevant as a baseline for other populations. What the data show is that there is a risk of neurological damage for persons whose blood levels show a concentration of methyl mercury in the range of 100-500 ppb. The difference between the Iraqi situation and the Canadian case of mercury poisoning in N.W. Ontario lies in the temporal nature of the exposure to mercury. In Iraq, the exposure was a brief one, with relatively large doses of mercury ingested over a period of one to three months. In Japan, the exposure was for a longer period although this has not been documented in detail. In Canada, the exposure of the Indian people is seasonal, with the highest levels of mercury concentration in blood following the end of the summer's guiding period.

Data Source: F. Bakir, S.F. Damluji, L. Amin-Zaki, et al., "Methylmercury poisoning in Iraq: an Inter-University Report", Science, 181 (1973). Data quoted in David Shephard, "Methyl Mercury Poisoning in Canada", Canadian Medical Association Journal, 114 (March 1976), pp. 463-472.

The total body burden of mercury can also be measured by the analysis of mercury values in human hair. Not only is the concentration of mercury in hair proportional to the simultaneous concentration of mercury in blood, but the hair sample also provides a history of previous exposure to the toxin.<sup>17</sup> The level of mercury in hair is given in units of parts per million (ppm). The criteria of "safe" levels of mercury in hair vary as they do in blood, but generally for persons having minimal environmental exposure to mercury, mercury levels in hair should be about 6 ppm. In Japan, all those people who had hair values of 200 ppm or more in 1965 are now seriously ill with Minamata Disease; some of those who had hair levels between 100 and 200 ppm are now certified patients; and, a few with hair levels between 50 and 100 ppm have the initial symptoms of mercury poisoning.<sup>18</sup>

Against this background of information on the nature of poisoning by one of the world's oldest metals, and its transformation to a lethal organic state in the sediment of water bodies, we can now proceed to a more detailed examination of the situation in Northwestern Ontario. Particular attention will be given to: the amount of mercury dumped in the English-Wabigoon river; the concentrations of mercury in fish and wildlife; the levels of exposure to methyl mercury documented for the people of Grassy Narrows and Whitedog; and, the incidence of the symptoms of Minamata Disease.

---

17

Hair grows at about 1 cm. per month. Collected next to the scalp, the first 1 cm. segment indicates exposure over the previous month; at 10 cm. from the scalp, analysis would indicate the exposure to mercury ten months prior to the collection of the sample, and so on. Thus, the quantification of the level of mercury in human hair provides a recapitulation of past levels of exposure. Furthermore, hair samples are considered "good indicator media" because they are easy to collect, transport, and store.

18

Memorandum from the Mercury Team, National Indian Brotherhood to the Standing Committee on Mercury in the Environment, October 9, 1975.

Methyl Mercury in Northwestern Ontario:  
A Review of the Scientific and Medical Evidence

Following the experience of Minamata and Iraq, a series of international conferences took place in the late 1960's to signal the link between mercury poisoning and the consumption of mercury-contaminated food. At about the same time, Swedish scientists established that very high levels of mercury found in fish and wildlife were related to upstream chlor-alkali and pulp and paper plants. They found that micro-organisms in the sediments of water bodies, where effluent from such plants was deposited, were able to methylate inorganic mercury into methyl mercury. The first studies in Canada, carried out in 1969, showed significant levels of mercury in fish in the south Saskatchewan River and very high levels downstream from Saskatoon where there was a pulp and paper mill and chlor-alkali plant. In the same year, officials of the Ontario Water Resources Commission (OWRC) were alerted to very high concentrations of mercury in Lake St. Clair. It did not take very long for OWRC officials to confirm that fish taken downstream from all the chlor-alkali plants in the province had unacceptable levels of mercury, sometimes more than forty times the standard of 0.5 ppm set for export and human consumption by the federal government. The Lake St. Clair fishery was closed. In March, 1970, the Ontario Minister of Energy and Resource Management, the Hon. George Kerr, ordered all the companies with substantial mercury losses from their industrial processes to stop discharging mercury into the environment.<sup>19</sup> In May of 1970, commercial fishing on all lakes in the English-Wabigoon river system was banned.

There was cause for concern. Fish in the three-hundred mile river system, from Dryden to the Manitoba border (see Figure III:1) were found to contain mercury burdens comparable to those found in the fish of

---

<sup>19</sup>

The following companies were ordered to stop discharging mercury: Dow Chemical, in Sarnia and Thunder Bay; Canadian Industries Limited, in Hamilton and Cornwall; American Can Company, in Marathon; Strathcona Paper Company, in Strathcona; Domtar, in Cornwall; Canadian Johns-Manville, in North Bay; Spruce Falls Power and Paper Company, in Kapuskasing; Beaver Wood Fibre, in Thorold, and Dryden Chemical Company, in Dryden. They were ordered to cut mercury losses under Section 50 of the Ontario Water Resources Commission Act, R.S.O. 1960.

Minamata Bay. Levels of methyl mercury in the aquatic food chain of the system, including bottom-dwelling organisms, crayfish, plankton, small fish, wildfowl, and fish-eating mammals, were found to be 10 to 50 times higher than in surrounding rivers and lakes off the English-Wabigoon river system.<sup>20</sup> Comprehensive studies of the mercury burden in fish in the early 1970's revealed levels of contamination so high that no species of fish from any lake on the river system was fit for human consumption. The range of mean mercury concentration in the three most commercially viable species of fish found in the English-Wabigoon river system was as follows (1975 data): pike, 2.31 ppm to 5.18 ppm; walleye, 1.58 ppm to 5.98 ppm; whitefish, 0.47 ppm to 2.01 ppm. The level of mercury in the same species and size of fish taken from the off-system lakes was, by contrast, several times lower. In the off-system fish, the range of mean mercury concentration was as follows: pike, 0.47 ppm to 1.39 ppm; walleye, 0.38 ppm to 1.08 ppm; whitefish, 0.04 ppm to 0.24 ppm.<sup>21</sup> Although there has been a slight decline in mean mercury values in some species of fish since peak values were recorded in 1970, the decline has not been of sufficient magnitude to inspire confidence that the English-Wabigoon river system will heal itself

---

20

The greatest concentration of mercury was found among the organisms dwelling on the sediment bottom, particularly crayfish. In 1970, the average value of mercury in crayfish was 10 ppm, a value about 20 times greater than mercury levels in crayfish from unpolluted adjacent lakes and rivers. A comprehensive survey of mercury accumulation by all organisms in the system was carried out by the staff of the Freshwater Institute of the Fisheries Marine Service in Winnipeg. See A.L. Hamilton, "A Survey of Mercury Levels in the Biota of a Mercury Contaminated River System in Northwestern Ontario", The Freshwater Institute, Report No. 1167, 1972.

In 1971, Norvald Fimreite studied fish-eating birds and waterfowl on the English-Wabigoon river system; he found very high levels of mercury in the tissues of birds. Similar mercury values were found in another study of birds around Clay Lake: K. Vermeer, F.A.J. Armstrong, and D. Hatch, "Mercury in Aquatic Birds at Clay Lake, Western Ontario", Journal of Wildlife Management 37, (1973).

21

The most comprehensive work on the levels of mercury in fish of the English-Wabigoon river system was done by Bishop and Neary. They compiled and analyzed data on over 11,000 fish of 19 species from 17 lakes on and off the river system. See J.N. Bishop and B.P. Neary, Mercury Levels in Fish from Northwestern Ontario 1970-1975, Inorganic Trace Contaminants Section, Laboratory Services Branch, Ontario Ministry of the Environment, April 1976, p. 78.

quickly.<sup>22</sup> The length of recovery time is, of course, related to the amount of inorganic mercury dumped in the river system as industrial waste or otherwise discharged through aerial emissions.

Between March 1962 and October 1975, the Dryden Chemical Company operated a mercury cathode chlor-alkali plant which produced between 20 and 34 tons of chlorine and other chemicals per day for use as bleach in the adjacent pulp and paper mill of Reed Paper Ltd. (Dryden Division).<sup>23</sup> The mill produced between 126,000 and 190,000 tons of bleached and unbleached pulp per year. Scientists have estimated that between 1962 and 1975, about 40,000 pounds of mercury were "lost" to the environment via aquatic and aerial discharges, of which about 20,000 pounds entered the English-Wabigoon river system.<sup>24</sup> Prior to the issuance of the 1970 control order to

---

22

Because so little of the waterway's burden of inorganic mercury is methylated each year (only about 1%), scientists estimate that it may take from 70-100 years for the mercury to clear the system. After the mercury loading stops, however, natural restorative processes occur to help reduce the concentration of mercury in the sediment. These include the trapping and isolation of mercury by further sedimentation, the "flushing" of the system by the natural seasonal flow of water, and the transport of mercury further downstream. Researchers have found that between 1970 and 1975, the level of mercury in the sediment 20 miles from the source of pollution in Dryden has decreased by one-half; further downstream, however, levels have remained high in the vicinity of Clay Lake (60 miles from Dryden - see Figure III:1); and even further downstream, the level of mercury in the sediment has actually increased.

23

The Dryden plant contained 20 Krebs type electrolytic cells in which metallic mercury formed the cathode in the production of bleaching agents (chlorine, caustic soda, and sodium chlorate). Each cell contained about 3,000 lbs. of mercury at any given time. It is only in recent years that the technology has been developed to produce a high quality bleach without the use of mercury cathode cells.

24

This is the estimate given by J.A. Spence in a scientific paper prepared for the Anti-Mercury Ojibway Group called "Inorganic Mercury Discharges and Emissions by the Dryden Chemical Co. Ltd., March 1962 to October 1975", April 1977, p. 9. Dr. Spence bases his estimates on known empirical relationships between chlorine production, mercury consumption, and mercury losses per ton of chlorine produced. Mercury is lost to the environment in waste water from the plant, in sludge resulting from the precipitation of impurities in brine, and in atmospheric emissions from the mercury cell room. No direct estimate of aerial emissions of mercury has been made, although studies at similar plants have shown that such discharges form a substantial proportion of total losses; and furthermore,

stop all mercury discharges into water systems, all the waste from the mercury cells was going into the air and into the Wabigoon river. In 1970-1971, effluent treatment systems were installed to isolate the heavy metal in the effluent. This resulted in a dramatic decline in the amount of mercury going into the river, although aerial emissions continued. The loss of mercury to the environment was finally halted when the technology of the industrial process changed in 1975. Although the company has tried to point out, in its own defense, that mercury occurs "naturally" in the environment, and that therefore its effluent was not the only source of mercury in the river, the sheer volume of mercury discharged as industrial waste undermines this argument. Scientific studies have concluded that:

"Factors such as mineralization, mining activities, and aerial fallout cannot account for the elevated mercury levels found in fish from the Wabigoon-English system of lakes. The major source of mercury pollution in the area is the chlor-alkali plant/pulp and paper complex in Dryden, Ontario."<sup>25</sup>

In the context of the information presented on the source and extent of mercury contamination in northwestern Ontario, we can now undertake a review of existing data with respect to the effect of mercury on the health of the Grassy Narrows people.<sup>26</sup> We begin by presenting the results of the blood and hair testing program carried out by the Medical Services Branch of the Department of National Health and Welfare (Table III:2). Since the signs and symptoms of methyl mercury poisoning can be expected to appear in the most sensitive individuals when blood concentrations are in the range of 200 to 500 ppb, the data in Table III:3 identify the number of individuals at Grassy Narrows whose blood levels of mercury have, at any point in time, exceeded the "safe" limit of 100 ppb. This is the population that is considered to be "at risk".

---

they "fall out" in the immediate vicinity and are then washed into the adjacent river system. The total mercury available to the English-Wabigoon river (from both aerial and direct aquatic emissions) is estimated to be between 30,000 and 46,000 lbs. (1962-1975); the remainder (from estimated total losses of 50,000 lbs.) is mercury trapped in special disposal pits and buried.

<sup>25</sup>

Bishop and Neary, Mercury Levels in Fish from Northwestern Ontario, p.78

<sup>26</sup>

Grassy Narrows is not the only Indian community affected by the contamination of the English-Wabigoon river system. Further downstream is Whitedog (also called the Islington Band), and its residents also have elevated levels of mercury in blood. The focus in this paper is on Grassy Narrows, although data are available for Whitedog as well.

Table III:2

LEVELS OF EXPOSURE TO METHYL MERCURY: GRASSY NARROWS

<u>Year</u>	<u>Total No. Tests</u>	<u>Test Results: Levels of Mercury in Blood (ppb)*</u>						
		<u>0-19</u>	<u>20-99</u>	<u>100-199</u>	<u>200-299</u>	<u>300-399</u>	<u>400-499</u>	<u>500-699</u>
1971	70	12	45	11	1	1	-	-
1973	72	18	46	6	2	-	-	-
1974	75	49	17	7	1	-	1	-
1975	131	29	44	42	11	2	2	1
1976	487	377	94	13	2	1	-	-
1977	519	413	94	7	3	1	1	-
1978	253	204	40	5	3	-	1	-

\*

The above figures are the total result of hair and blood sampling among the residents of Grassy Narrows over the 1971-1978 period. They include follow-up or repeat tests on some individuals because the purpose of the testing program is to identify those individuals "at risk", i.e. with blood levels of mercury above 100 ppb.

The results are expressed in terms of blood levels. The levels of mercury in hair have been converted to a blood equivalent. In all cases, the highest segmental level of mercury in any hair sample has been chosen for conversion to blood equivalent and inclusion in this table. These figures, then, represent the peak levels of mercury found in any given test on any one individual.

Data Source: Methylmercury in Canada (Ottawa: Health and Welfare Canada, December 1979), pp. 126-169.



Table III:3

INDIVIDUALS "AT RISK": BLOOD LEVELS OF MERCURY >100 PPB  
GRASSY NARROWS AND WHITEDOG RESERVES

<u>Year</u>	<u>Community</u>	<u>Total No. Persons</u>	<u>Blood Levels (ppb)</u>				
			<u>100-199</u>	<u>200-299</u>	<u>300-399</u>	<u>400-499</u>	<u>500-699</u>
1971	Grassy N.	10	8	1	1	-	-
	Whitedog	22	18	2	1	-	1
1973	Grassy N.	7	6	1	-	-	-
	Whitedog	11	9	2	-	-	-
1974	Grassy N.	6	4	1	-	1	-
	Whitedog	3	3	-	-	-	-
1975	Grassy N.	39	27	8	1	2	1
	Whitedog	8	8	-	-	-	-
1976	Grassy N.	10	8	2	-	-	-
	Whitedog	9	9	-	-	-	-
1977*	Grassy N.	6	3	1	1	1	-
1978*	Grassy N.	9	5	3	-	1	-

\*

Information on the number of individuals at risk on the Whitedog Indian reserve is not available for the years 1977 and 1978.

Data Source: As in Table III:2.

As of 1978, there were 546 individuals in Canada with mercury levels above 100 ppb; 402 (74%) were from Quebec, and 105 (19%) were from Ontario.<sup>27</sup> Of the 105 individuals at risk in Ontario, 59 were from Grassy Narrows and 39 were from Whitedog. The majority of individuals at risk in Ontario (69%) were males in the working age group (15-65) primarily because the occupation of guiding in the fishing camps on the English-Wabigoon river system affords the greatest opportunity for the seasonal consumption of contaminated fish.

Although the levels of exposure to methyl mercury can be documented by blood and hair tests, the clinical diagnosis of mercury poisoning in Whitedog and Grassy Narrows has proven extremely difficult. In May 1973, eighteen residents of the two communities who had blood levels of mercury in excess of 100 ppb were invited to undergo extensive clinical examinations at the Winnipeg General Hospital. Tests on the six individuals who agreed to these examinations revealed no evidence of mercury intoxication.<sup>28</sup> In March 1975, one of the world's leading diagnosticians of mercury poisoning who had worked in Minamata, Dr. Masazumi Harada, visited Grassy Narrows and Whitedog. He observed that some of the fish, aquatic birds, and fish-eating mammals (such as otter and mink) in the polluted area had levels of mercury in tissue as high as those recorded in Minamata. He also confirmed that the symptoms of cats near Whitedog that had been fed mercury-contaminated fish were exactly the same as those observed in Minamata cats that had died from methyl mercury poisoning. With respect to a positive diagnosis of Minamata Disease among the Indian people, however, he was much less certain. Dr. Harada examined 89 residents of Grassy Narrows and Whitedog and found a variety of neurological symptoms and signs. In his report, he stated:

---

27

Information on the extent of the mercury problem in Canada as a whole is available in: Department of National Health and Welfare, Medical Services Branch, Methylmercury in Canada (Ottawa: December 1979).

28

Task Force on Organic Mercury in the Environment, p. 13.  
One of the six Indians examined in Winnipeg had mercury levels of 126 and 55 ppb in the blood, together with "occasional numbness and shakiness of his hands and arms", "vestibular function - consistent with but not diagnostic of, a cerebellar lesion" and "evidence of borderline peripheral neuropathy". David A.E. Shepard, "Methyl Mercury Poisoning in Canada", Canadian Medical Association Journal, vol. 114; no. 5, (1976), p. 471.

"Health surveys were conducted...on the two reservations by the same methods applied in our mass examination for Minamata disease in Japan... Many neurological symptoms were found. It cannot be concluded that all of these symptoms resulted from methyl mercury. However, symptoms observed frequently in Minamata disease...were immediately recognized.

We conducted health surveys of 89 inhabitants, and found the following: disturbance of eye movement (12 cases); impaired hearing (40 cases); sensory disturbance (37 cases); contraction of the visual field (16 cases); tremor (21 cases); hyporeflexia (diminution of reflexes) (20 cases); ataxia (8 cases); dysarthria (5 cases). The neurological symptoms are characteristic of mercury poisoning. However, the symptoms are relatively mild, and many of them were thought to be caused by other factors.

Epidemiological studies comparing polluted groups with non-polluted groups are necessary for the detection of illness. Even though typical cases [at Grassy Narrows and Whitedog] may be absent, methyl mercury poisoning must be suspected whenever there is a high incidence of contraction of the visual fields, and sensory disturbance, especially when the same symptoms are prevalent in families."<sup>29</sup>

Dr. Harada acknowledged that there were substantial differences in density of population, mode of life, diet, and source of pollution between Minamata and northwestern Ontario. He also recognized that sensory disturbance of the "glove and stocking type" (numbness in the extremities), which is one of the most characteristic early symptoms of Minamata Disease, is also observed for alcoholism and for a variety of other disorders. Thus, in the 15 cases (of the 89) that showed such symptoms, it was difficult to identify the conditions as methyl mercury poisoning. The influence of methyl mercury in causing the various neurological symptoms was cautiously declared as "possible" but not certain.

---

29

Masazumi Harada, "Epidemiological and Clinical Study of Mercury Pollution on Indian Reservations in Northwestern Ontario, Canada", Unpublished manuscript, 1976, pp. 8-10 and p. 13-14.

In the same year, the Medical Services Branch of the Department of Health and Welfare obtained the consulting services of another distinguished and internationally-known expert on mercury poisoning. Dr. T.W. Clarkson, of Rochester University, carried out an extensive program of medical testing at Grassy Narrows and Whitedog in the summer of 1975. In his report, produced in January 1976, Dr. Clarkson concluded that:

"Several individuals in both Reserves still have unacceptably high blood levels of methyl mercury.

Very high exposure to methyl mercury continues to be a serious problem with guides working at fishing camps. The highest concentrations of mercury ever reported from White Dog and Grassy Narrows Reserves, approximately 150 ppm in hair equivalent to 500 ppb in blood, occurred in the summer of 1975 despite the fact that warnings against eating contaminated fish have been in effect for several years and that an intensive health education campaign has been in effect during the past year.

Wives of guides have a higher exposure to methyl mercury than other females. A matter of most serious concern is the exposure to methyl mercury of pregnant females."<sup>30</sup>

Dr. Clarkson focused his work on the two reserves on the determination of levels of exposure to methyl mercury rather than on the observation of clinical symptoms that may be attributable to methyl mercury. Of the eleven guides he tested at Grassy Narrows, three had blood concentrations above 200 ppb, and five had concentrations above 100 ppb; all eleven had concentrations above the "normal" limit of 20 ppb. These were "peak" values translated from data obtained during full longitudinal analysis of hair samples. These values corresponded to periods

---

30

T.W. Clarkson, Exposure to Methyl Mercury in Grassy Narrows and White Dog Reserves, Report prepared for the Medical Services Branch, Health and Welfare Canada, 1976, p. 43.

Dr. Clarkson was particularly concerned about exposure to mercury by pregnant women because he tested a newborn infant and found that the child had 30 ppm of mercury in her hair, equivalent to 100 ppb in blood. Furthermore, he was worried about guides at Grassy Narrows for he discovered that mercury levels among adult males were about 50% higher at Grassy Narrows than at Whitedog.

of heavy fish consumption during the summer and early fall; at other times, mercury levels were considerably lower. The cyclical pattern of exposure to methyl mercury was particularly evident for guides because they normally eat fish with the tourists during the summer's guiding season. Dr. Clarkson recommended that there be a program to reduce the fish intake of guides, that priority be given to the expansion of clinical testing, that the emphasis on the surveillance of pregnant women for exposure to methyl mercury be strengthened, and that the health education program on the reserves be continued.

In 1976, another distinguished neurologist with experience in methyl mercury poisoning, Dr. J.S. Pritchard of the University of Toronto, visited Grassy Narrows and Whitedog. After testing residents in 1976, and again in 1977 and 1979, Dr. Pritchard concluded that the clinical examination alone was inadequate for a definitive diagnosis of mercury poisoning at the levels of exposure documented for residents of these two communities. In short, of the 40 persons with elevated mercury blood levels that were clinically examined for Minamata Disease by December 31, 1978, the findings were negative for 25 cases, positive but not related to mercury in 5 cases, and positive and only "possibly" related to mercury in 10 cases.<sup>31</sup>

A definitive diagnosis of Minamata Disease at Grassy Narrows or at Whitedog continues to elude the medical establishment. What is known is that as far as "exposure to methyl mercury" is concerned, the very high levels of mercury in blood associated with this disease in Japan and Iraq have not been encountered among residents of these two communities. With two exceptions, the highest levels of mercury in blood documented over the 1971-1978 period have fallen into the range of 200-500 ppb, with most levels clustered at the lower end of this range. The World Health Organization has found that this is the range where the first symptoms of

---

31

Methylmercury in Canada, p. 192. Of the 10 individuals in the group found to have neurological abnormalities possibly attributable to methyl mercury toxicity, seven had peak recorded mercury levels between 100-199, one had a level of 277 ppb, one a peak level of 337 ppb and one a peak level of 417 ppb.

methyl mercury poisoning occur with a prevalence of about 5%.<sup>32</sup> There is still no proof of a definitive link between mercury exposure and clinical effects for any individual at Grassy Narrows or Whitedog. Yet, the very difficulties of diagnosis in this situation are a cause of concern.

In the first place, there are differences between Japanese and Canadian neurologists, and among Canadian neurologists, with respect to the specific features or symptoms that are required for a definitive diagnosis of mercury poisoning at Grassy Narrows and Whitedog. One of the problems hampering agreement on what constitutes a positive diagnosis is that the signs and symptoms of poisoning, at least in the early stages, are non-specific and few can be attributed with certainty to poisoning by methyl mercury.

"In view of this lack of specificity, which may lead one neurologist to attribute a sign such as tremor or constriction of the visual field to mercury poisoning, yet another to be less definite, one must to some extent rely on circumstantial evidence if one is to give a definite answer to the question of whether mercury poisoning exists in Canada.

A close look at the available evidence suggests that mercury poisoning is a possibility, if not a probability. The evidence for mercury poisoning is credible, whereas there is no evidence that mercury poisoning does not exist."<sup>33</sup>

In the second place, the relevance of data on Minamata Disease from Japan and Iraq to the situation in northwestern Ontario is not entirely clear. The pattern of exposure to methyl mercury by the Indians of Whitedog and Grassy Narrows is different. The Indians eat fish seasonally; their diet is not totally dependent upon fish, even in the summer; the consumption of fish is heaviest among guides and their families, but fish is relatively unimportant in the diet of wage-earners who prefer to

---

<sup>32</sup> World Health Organization, Environmental Health Criteria: Mercury (Geneva: W.H.O., 1976).

<sup>33</sup> Shepard, "Methyl Mercury Poisoning in Canada", p. 471.

buy food from the store. This pattern of intermittent exposure to a wide range of daily intakes of fish repeats itself every year. It should be apparent that this pattern differs markedly from both the intensive exposure of persons to methyl mercury over a very short period of time (as in Iraq) and the exposure to much higher levels of mercury, related to a considerably greater reliance on fish in the diet, sustained over a longer period of time (as in Japan). Indeed, in Iraq the effects of methyl mercury poisoning were not exactly identical to those in Japan.<sup>34</sup> This variability in effects, which is linked to the pattern of exposure, may mean that the dose-response relationships documented for other contexts are of limited applicability to northwestern Ontario. So far, at Grassy Narrows and Whitedog, the association of peak mercury levels in individuals with positive clinical findings has been random; so far, there has been no unequivocal diagnosis of Minamata Disease. The fact is, however, that very little is known about "chronic" and low-level exposure to methyl mercury, the effects of which are "subclinical" and possibly cumulative. There may be subtle neurological, behavioural and intellectual changes that are not detectable at the present time. Canadian medical officials admit that,

"Milder forms of mercury poisoning, though difficult to prove conclusively, quite possibly are occurring. Certainly, given the levels found in some individuals, cause for concern and caution exists."<sup>35</sup>

The focus of the Medical Services Branch mercury program is on continued surveillance and testing of the individuals most "at risk" at Grassy Narrows and Whitedog, namely, fishing guides, heavy fish eaters,

---

34

In Iraq, no symptoms were observed in patients who had blood mercury levels of less than 200 ppb. No deaths were reported at exposure levels below 3000 ppb. There was a striking variability in the severity of symptoms and signs, even within families having similar blood levels. In contrast to Japan, with the exception of fetal cases, mild to moderate cases showed a tendency toward improvement of clinical disabilities over time. Furthermore, late appearances of signs and symptoms did not occur in Iraq, as it did in Japan. Methylmercury in Canada, p. 41-42.

35

Ibid., p. 79.

and pregnant women. The emphasis on pregnant women is justified because the fetal brain is much more sensitive to methyl mercury than the adult brain; however, both the critical level of fetal exposure and the long-term developmental effects of exposure remain to be assessed.

This concludes our brief overview of the evidence with respect to the extent of mercury contamination in the English-Wabigoon river system and the effects on the health of the people of Grassy Narrows. Irrespective of the cumulative results of testing, which show relatively low levels of methyl mercury exposure, and notwithstanding the inconclusive findings with respect to the clinical symptoms of poisoning, some individuals and groups in the white society continue to maintain that methyl mercury is the silent and slow "killer" of the people of Grassy Narrows and Whitedog. Although their concern about the long-term effects of contamination is legitimate, they have sometimes implied that the Medical Services Branch of the Government of Canada has been engaged in a "conspiracy" to "cover-up" relevant medical data. Such allegations have played havoc with the feelings of the Indian people about mercury. Given the residual mistrust of government in the Indian community, the uncertainty about whether or not government officials were telling the "truth" about mercury has left deep psychological scars at Grassy Narrows. Objective assessment of the extent of the damage by mercury to human health has been made difficult by the "politics" of the mercury issue. We will return to this subject in a moment; at this point, we will proceed to evaluate the economic impact of mercury contamination.



### The Economic Impacts of Mercury Contamination

The discovery of mercury in the English-Wabigoon river system had a direct and immediate impact on the livelihood of the Grassy Narrows people:

"One day [in May 1970] government people just came and told us to stop fishing. Nobody explained what mercury is or how people get sick from it. All they told us was not to eat the fish anymore. Next thing that happened was that Barney Lamm closed down his Ball Lake Lodge, and suddenly, everybody who guided for Barney was out of a job."<sup>36</sup>

The abrupt collapse of the commercial fishery and the disruption of guiding sent shock waves throughout the community. In the absence of information about mercury, the people could not understand how something that happened far away in Dryden could affect them; they could not taste or see the presence of mercury in fish. Yet, suddenly, their river was no longer a source of food and they could no longer make a living from fishing or guiding.

The loss of the sense of security in Nature as a bountiful provider, the loss of an economic base from which people could be relatively self-reliant in terms of their livelihood, are deprivations which cannot be "measured". Similarly, it is not possible to fully assess the sense of loss that people must have felt when commercial fishing, one of the few remaining occupations that permitted families to work together, ceased. Because sons worked alongside fathers, and wives tended nets while husbands were guiding, commercial fishing had provided some continuity with traditional ways of living from the land and organizing work within a family group. Although it was not a "traditional" occupation as such at Grassy Narrows (since it began only in the mid-1950's), in the late 1960's

---

36

John Swain, March 23, 1979; Pat Loon, translator.

seven out of the nine families that worked in the fishery were "traditional" families who struggled to maintain the "Indian way of life".<sup>37</sup>

Commercial fishing offered other advantages. It fitted very well into the seasonal cycle of work and it was a productive, and therefore meaningful occupation. It offered flexibility in terms of the allocation of time between guiding and commercial fishing. Men who guided during the week could fish during the weekend; those who guided every day for the full season between mid-May and mid-October could take up fishing for the last three or four weeks in the fall until freeze-up. This was in fact the preferred strategy; commercial fishing in the fall was a profitable activity and good money could be made in a short time. In the late 1960's, about twenty-three full-time guides participated in commercial fishing after guiding was over, while about fourteen Band members (men and women) fished full-time during the entire open-water season. A handful of younger Band members also worked in the fishery as "helpers" when they needed extra income. In short, commercial fishing provided a very important economic option at Grassy Narrows, although it never achieved the same prominence in the structure of the community economy as it had at Whitedog.<sup>38</sup>

While many of the former fishermen at Grassy Narrows attach less importance to the loss of income from commercial fishing than to the loss of a productive activity that was part of "a way of life", an assessment of the significance of the closure of the fishery would not be complete

---

37

The heads of these families were all older men who, prior to the relocation, maintained the trapping culture. The families were headed by: John Beaver, John Kokopenace, Adam Keewatin, John Swain, Joe Ashopenace, Tom Payash, and Andy Keewatin.

38

Commercial fishing was much more restricted at Grassy Narrows than at Whitedog. The Grassy Narrows licence, for example, was not valid from April 1 to September 30 (except for the waters within reserve boundaries), exactly the months when most commercial fishing took place at Whitedog. Furthermore, the licence limited the total catch of fish to not more than ten tons of pickerel and pike combined, a total commercial value (1969 prices) of about \$5,249.00, assuming a pike:pickerel ratio consistent with the overall catch in northwest Ontario.

without an estimate of economic losses. One possible method of calculating the value of the commercial fishery lost to the Grassy Narrows Band as a result of mercury contamination involves the utilization of the average annual catch of fish by species and by weight over the number of years that the fishery was in operation, times the average price per pound in the late 1960's, projected over the number of years that the fish will remain poisoned and unfit for human consumption and export. This method is based on the assumption that the harvest levels during the 1957-1969 period would have continued into the 1970's and beyond. There are a number of factors that influence the validity of this assumption.

First, from a biological viewpoint, we do not know whether or not the "maximum sustainable yield" per species in the English-Wabigoon river system determined for the 1960's could have been sustained long-term. This is a question that only fisheries biologists can answer.<sup>39</sup> Second, and more importantly, the Ontario government has a policy of giving priority to sports fishing over commercial fishing. In view of the ever-increasing restrictions and quotas that are being placed on other Indian bands who are commercial fishing in the Lake of the Woods area, it is probable that the fishing effort of the Grassy Narrows Band also would have been curtailed in the 1980's, or at least not allowed to expand. These considerations have a bearing on the assumption that the Band's average annual harvest of fish in the 1957-1969 period would have continued indefinitely. On the other side of the ledger, however, is the probability that the existing harvest data underestimate the true harvest of fish in any one year. The entire system of reporting total fish catches to the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources entailed a collective Band responsibility. Yet, the Band depended on individual fishermen to report their daily catches faithfully. Many of the casual fishermen did

---

39

Fisheries biologists, through a combination of knowledge of the productivity of fish species and intuition, use the concept of the "maximum sustainable yield" to determine the amount of fish that can be harvested from any body of water without damage to the stocks. They use their findings in setting constraints on fishing effort in certain lakes. These constraints take the form of regulations on commercial fishing by season, limitations on total catch, restrictions on gear (net size or type) and so on.

not report their catches; private sales to non-commercial buyers also went unrecorded. Ministry officials admit that those Bands that had weight quotas on certain species of fish written into their commercial fishing licences had little incentive to report their total catches accurately. Therefore, the records that are available for the harvest of fish before 1970 must be considered as the minimum estimates of total fishing effort. The production data from the commercial fishery at Grassy Narrows during the 1957-1969 period are presented in Part II, Figure II:8 and in the table on page 242.

An estimate of the total economic losses to the Grassy Narrows Band resulting from the closure of the commercial fishery can be developed subject to the following assumptions: first, we have to assume that the Band's fishing effort, measured in terms of the average annual harvest of fish in the 1957-1969 period, would have remained more or less the same after 1970. Second, we will assume that the limitations on the total catch and on the season, specified in the Band's licence since 1957, would have continued to prevail after 1970. Third, we will assume a 6% increase per year in the average prices per pound, current in the late 1960's and early 1970's, of the three most commercially valuable species of fish.<sup>40</sup>

---

40

Prices for the three most commercially valuable species of whitefish, walleye, and pike vary not only from year to year, but from season to season. For whitefish, prices vary according to the size, condition, and grade of the fish; for walleye, prices vary according to whether or not the fish is dressed, round, or headless and dressed. The point is that average prices for each species in any given year are only approximations of the economic return for a year's fishing effort.

In the early 1970's, prices for whitefish, walleye, and pike increased slightly from the levels prevailing in the late 1960's. This small increase is the reason why an inflation factor of only 6% has been chosen for the analysis. Given that price escalation has been much more rapid in the late 1970's and early 1980's, a sensitivity analysis using higher rates of price increase should be conducted. This exercise would be particularly important in an estimate of economic losses for the purposes of a legal claim against the polluter.

The other point to be noted is that the estimate of economic loss is based only on the species noted above. Over a 13-year period, coarse fish (suckers, mooneyes, ling, tullibees and others) accounted for 9% of the total harvest of fish by weight. Most species of coarse fish, however, have low commercial value; therefore, they have been left out of the calculation of total economic loss.

We assume these average prices per pound of fish to be as follows: walleye (pickerel) \$0.50; whitefish \$0.33; and pike \$0.17. Finally, since scientists cannot estimate with precision how long the fish will remain poisoned with unacceptable levels of methyl mercury, the analysis has to take into account different assumptions with respect to time. The most optimistic estimate of the period of recovery, and one based on the pattern demonstrated in the St. Clair system, is 20 years; however, sedimentation, flushing, and methylation rates in the English Wabigoon river system may be so different as to warrant an estimate of 50 (minimum) to 70 years for recovery.

Based on an average annual production level of 15,382 pounds of whitefish, 9,249 pounds of walleye, and 7,782 pounds of pike over a 13-year period (1957-1969), and an average annual value of \$5,076 for whitefish, \$4,625 for walleye, and \$1,323 for pike, the projected economic losses resulting from the closure of the fishery for a 20, 50, and 70 year period are as follows:

	<u>1970-1990</u>	<u>1970-2020</u>	<u>1970-2040</u>
Whitefish	\$101,520	\$253,800	\$355,320
Walleye	92,500	231,250	323,750
Pike	26,460	66,150	92,610
	<u>\$220,480</u>	<u>\$551,200</u>	<u>\$771,680</u>
Assume 6% price increase per year	\$405,500	\$3,193,700	\$10,670,129

This calculation of economic loss should be considered as a minimum approximation of the total real value of the commercial fishery lost to the Grassy Narrows Band.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, at the time commercial fishing

---

41

My estimate for the 1970-1990 period is close to the estimate of economic loss prepared by Brian Felske. On the basis of production figures of an annual average level of 15,869 pounds of whitefish, 8,828.7 pounds of walleye, and 7,704 pounds of pike, Brian Felske estimates the total economic loss to the Grassy Narrows Band to be \$441,618.16 for the 1970-1990 period. To arrive at this figure, Felske uses 1977 fish prices, and an inflation rate of 7% per year for the 1978- 1990 period. Brian Felske, "Certain Aspects of the Commercial Fishery at White Dog and Grassy Narrows", Unpublished paper, January 25, 1978.

In another study, the minimum estimate for the average annual catch and value of the commercial fishery during the late 1960 's is given as 70,000 pounds of fish valued at \$24,500. Even if one takes into account the likelihood that MNR records of fish harvests underestimate the true

ceased, some individual families had a considerable investment in gear and equipment and this should also be counted as an economic loss.<sup>42</sup>

Between 1970 and 1973, the Government of Ontario attempted to make compensatory payments to the Grassy Narrows commercial fishermen. These "forgivable loans" averaged a paltry sum of only \$311.08 per person. Over three years, the total compensation paid out to nineteen commercial fishermen amounted to \$5,910.50.<sup>43</sup>

In sum, even by the most conservative and cautious estimates, the economic loss of the fishery was not insignificant. Closely allied to commercial fishing, moreover, was the retention of fish for domestic consumption. Walleye was the preferred species, although all species of fish were so readily available as a by-product of both commercial fishing and guiding, that they were a staple in the diet of those families that were engaged in these activities. A 1973 report on dietary problems at Grassy Narrows and Whitedog concluded that,

"...fish consumption was not important in the winter months [and] aside from one or two individuals in each community, there was no exclusive fishing for subsistence. Almost all the fish consumed were by-products of either the commercial

---

production levels, this estimate seems high. The Band's annual production of whitefish averaged around 15,400 lbs. and its catch of pike and pickerel combined was limited by licence to 20,000 lbs. According to the above figures, total economic losses for the 1970-1990 period are estimated at \$490,000 (not including an inflation factor). Peter Usher, "The Economic and Social Impact of Mercury Poisoning on Whitedog and Grassy Narrows Indian Reserves, Ontario", p. 175.

42

This gear and equipment would have included a boat and motor, nets, twine, and other miscellaneous items. Aside from boats and motors which could be used for other purposes, the capital invested in commercial fishing gear was effectively "lost". We do not have an estimate of the value of the losses sustained in gear and equipment.

43

"Payments Made to Fishermen - Grassy Narrows Band, 1970-1973", Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR), Ontario. The relatively greater importance of the commercial fishery at Whitedog is indicated by the fact that the Ontario government paid out a total of \$55,141.00 to Whitedog commercial fishermen over the same period.

fishery or the fish guiding industry....the guide would frequently bring some of the day's catch home to his family in the evening....Among the commercial fishermen, unsalable small fish were used for food.

The total community could be divided into three groups from the point of view of diet. First there were those who worked for wages and purchased all their food from the store. Second, those who guided, ate fish while guiding, augmented by store food during winter. Thirdly, there were the very few trappers who would eat store food in the summer (with considerable fish) and who would live almost exclusively on bush food in the winter."<sup>44</sup>

This study found that after 1970 the consumption of fish by people in both communities was drastically reduced. The diet had become heavily dependent on starches and "most people were not eating fish if there was something else to eat."<sup>45</sup> The loss of fish as a back-up option in the diet eliminated an important source of protein and placed a heavy burden on those families who could not afford to purchase food from the store. Recognizing this problem, the Ontario government in 1975 began delivering uncontaminated fish to both communities. Stored in freezers on both reserves, this fish was available to all Band members; however, people found the fish "mushy" and tasteless when they cooked it. This "Fish for Food Programme" thus provided only a partial solution to the problem of an alternative protein source. What was truly lost was the ability of the people to provide for their own food needs without being dependent upon external sources of supply or subject to the mercy of government politicians and bureaucrats.

---

44

Ignatius E. La Rusic, "A Report on Mercury in the Environment in the Communities of White Dog and Grassy Narrows: The Dietary Aspects and Problems of Communicating with the Local Populations". Paper prepared for the Medical Services Branch of the Department of National Health and Welfare, July 31, 1973, pp. 9-10.

45

Historically, the Ojibwa have always concentrated on large game in the diet, using fish as a back-up food staple only when large game (moose and deer) were scarce. There was always the security of knowing that the river would be a bountiful provider if the hunt failed.

The other important sector in the Grassy Narrows economy affected by the contamination of the river was guiding. Early in the summer of 1970, Barney Lamm decided to close down his lodge at Ball Lake, presumably because he felt he could not expose either the guests or the guides to the risks of eating contaminated fish. The closure of Ball Lake, the most exclusive and luxurious lodge in the area, was a blow to many Grassy Narrows people who had worked for Barney Lamm since 1947. John Swain, Joe Loon, Steve Loon, George A. Keewatin, Andy Keewatin -- all these men guided for Barney Lamm every summer, for the full five months of the season, for over twenty years. Certainly they had a stake in his enterprise. They built the first cabins and saw the lodge grow from humble beginnings to a resort of considerable renown, especially among Americans of great wealth. These men had helped Barney Lamm make a personal fortune from the lodge. The experienced and knowledgeable guides often determined the success of the fishing holiday, while satisfied sports fishermen were Ball Lake's best publicity agents. The Grassy Narrows people, moreover, liked to guide, liked the way of life it made possible; most guides lived at Ball Lake with their families all summer. At the end of the season, almost everyone came back to the reserve with no money to show for the summer's labour; yet, "guiding...it was a good life."<sup>46</sup>

No wonder, then, that the closing of Ball Lake Lodge meant so much more to the Grassy Narrows people than the loss of "a job" or the loss of "wages". Barney Lamm was the "Patron", the "Seigneur", who ran his estate with just the right mixture of controlled benevolence, familiarity, and discipline that allowed him to capitalize from the supply of cheap and unorganized Indian labour. The Grassy Narrows guides considered him a good employer, and although there are continuing questions with respect to his motives for closing the lodge, to this day he commands their loyalty and their sentiment of nostalgia for a way of life that is no more.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup>

For a more detailed description of guiding work, rates of pay, conditions, and particularly, the closed system of earning and spending at Ball Lake, see Part II, pp. 153-158. The quotation is taken from Andy Keewatin's description of the clientele at Ball Lake Lodge, see p. 155.

<sup>47</sup>

The question of motives is taken up in the next section on the politics of the mercury issue.



The economic effects of the closure of Ball Lake Lodge have received considerable publicity in television programs, newspaper reports, and in the two books that were written on the subject of mercury contamination. Warner Troyer, in his book No Safe Place, quantifies the loss as follows:

"The men of Grassy Narrows and White Dog worked, happily and faithfully, as guides at the tourist lodges and fishing camps. They cooked and shared those ambrosial shore lunches with their guests, fishermen from Toronto and New York, from Chicago, Detroit, Dallas, Los Angeles and St. Louis....The largest lodge, Barney Lamm's Ball Lake Lodge, put a \$300,000 annual payroll into Grassy Narrows reserve, and alone employed virtually every employable Grassy Narrows adult....Its closure means, over forty years...lost wages totalling \$12 million."<sup>48</sup>

In the book, Grassy Narrows, George Hutchison devotes a chapter to Ball Lake Lodge and describes the romance, adventure, and splendor ("the stuff of memories") of summers at Ball Lake. Aside from the idolization of Barney Lamm and his wife Marion, and the assertion of a paradise for the Grassy Narrows guides who worked there, Hutchison also attempts to portray the closing of the lodge as a catastrophe to the community economy.<sup>49</sup> He states that seventy-five persons from Grassy Narrows were employed at Ball Lake and that the people "benefited by tying their fortunes to Barney's Ball Lake Lodge."<sup>50</sup> In order to check the validity of such a claim for economic loss, it is mandatory to look carefully at the data on the number of people from Grassy Narrows who were employed by Barney Lamm and to consider the levels of employment in the tourist industry as a whole in the late 1960's.

---

<sup>48</sup> Troyer, No Safe Place, p. 49.

<sup>49</sup> The rumours that Barney Lamm had financed the writing and publication of Grassy Narrows were so strong and widespread, that Hutchison felt compelled to deny them in the "acknowledgement" section of the book. The Grassy Narrows people apparently were embarrassed by this publication and the Chief and Band Council refused to give the book a formal endorsement. Conversation with Bill Fobister, March 18, 1977.

<sup>50</sup> George Hutchison, Grassy Narrows (Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold Ltd., 1977), p. 50.

A list has been compiled of Indian people working in tourist camps and fishing lodges during the late 1960's. From the information on community of residence, length of employment, and place of employment, we know that in 1968, Barney Lamm employed a total of 27 Indian guides; of the eleven guides that were employed for the full season, nine came from Grassy Narrows; of the twelve guides who worked part-time, at peak periods, six came from Grassy Narrows; of the four guides who worked for two months of the season, two came from Grassy Narrows. In short, in 1968, only seventeen guides from Grassy Narrows were employed either full-time or part-time by Ball Lake Lodge. A similar pattern holds for 1969. In this last year that the lodge was open for fishing, out of a total of 23 Indian guides, employed for the full season, only 14 guides came from Grassy Narrows.<sup>51</sup> Out of the seven part-time guides, five came from Grassy Narrows; the rest of the Indian guides came from Shoal Lake Indian reserve, Rat Portage, and Whitedog.

The contention that Ball Lake "employed virtually every employable Grassy Narrows adult" can therefore stand some qualification. The fact is that whereas Ball Lake employed only a certain proportion of its guides from Grassy Narrows, other lodges in the area, namely Delaney Lodge and Grassy Lodge, relied almost exclusively on people from Grassy Narrows to provide both guiding and other services.<sup>52</sup> The data with respect to the distribution of employment of Grassy Narrows people among lodges in the area are summarized in Table III:4.

---

51

In 1970, Ball Lake Lodge was still open for hunting. Of the twelve guides employed for the full season (4 weeks in the fall), eight came from Grassy Narrows. Seven part-time guides were also hired; four were from Grassy Narrows.

52

Neither Delaney Lodge nor Grassy Lodge closed down on account of mercury poisoning. Aside from Ball Lake, the only other lodge on the English-Wabigoon river system that closed down was Colin Myles' Separation Lake Camp. This camp employed guides mainly from Rat Portage Indian Reserve; no Grassy Narrows people were employed there in 1968 or 1969.

Table III:4

GUIDING PARTICIPATION RATES AT GRASSY NARROWS: 1968-1970

<u>Year</u>	<u>Lodge</u>	<u>Number of Guides Employed and Length of Employment*</u>			
		<u>Full Season</u> (14-19 weeks)	<u>Peak Season</u> (8-14 weeks)	<u>Occasional</u> (1-8 weeks)	<u>Total</u>
1968	Ball Lake Lodge	9	6	1	17
	Delaney Lodge	6	9	2	17
	Grassy Lodge	3	6	7	16
	Others (Caribou Lodge, Maynard Lake Camp)	<u>2</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>2</u>
		20	21	11	52
1969	Ball Lake Lodge	14	5		19
	Delaney Lodge	7	3	info.	10
	Grassy Lodge	7	6	not	13
	Others	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	available	<u>-</u>
		28	14		42
1970	Delaney Lodge	info.**	8	6	14
	Grassy Lodge	not	10	3	13
	Maynard Lake	available	-	9	9
	Minaki Lodge			3	3
	Others		<u>-</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>
			18	24	42

\*

The above data are limited to participation rates in guiding sports fishermen; hunting guides and women employed as cabin-girls are excluded.

\*\*

Information on guiding participation was obtained early in the 1970 season; therefore, the "full season" figures are not available.

Data Source: "Indians Employed at Tourist Camps, 1968-1970".

While Ball Lake Lodge may well have been the most prestigious and desirable place to work, the data on participation in guiding sports fishermen show that Barney Lamm was by no means the exclusive employer of the Grassy Narrows people. Yet, it is possible that he contributed about half of the total income from guiding (sports fishing and hunting) that came into the community economy each year.<sup>53</sup> If we estimate total income from guiding to be in the range of \$90,000-\$110,000 per year, this means that the closure of Ball Lake Lodge effectively removed anywhere from \$50,000-\$60,000 of gross annual income flowing into Grassy Narrows. This calculation of economic loss, however, has to be qualified by the fact that the majority of guides who worked for Barney Lamm eventually found guiding jobs elsewhere; the minority stopped guiding altogether.<sup>54</sup>

It is fair to say that the entire sports fishing industry on the English-Wabigoon river system suffered from the uncertainty surrounding the true hazard to human health posed by the mercury poisoning of the river. A tremendous amount of negative publicity on the mercury issue predisposed many tourists to stay away from northwestern Ontario, particularly during the 1970, 1971, and 1973 seasons. This general disruption in the tourist industry was as much a function of the politics of the mercury issue as of the mercury itself, and this thought leads us to the final section of Part III.

---

53

It is difficult to estimate total income from guiding (sports fishing and hunting) because we do not have data on how many people were employed in guiding hunters in the fall. In the late 1960's, however, at the rate of \$12.00 per day for guiding sports fishermen, a man could easily earn about \$1,600 in wages, with about \$500 in tips, if he guided every day for the full season which stretched from mid-May to the end of September. If he also guided hunters in October, at a daily rate of \$15.00, he could add, with tips, another \$800-\$900 dollars to his season's earnings. It is therefore possible that gross income from guiding (sports fishing and hunting) could have brought in anywhere from \$90,000-\$110,000 into the community economy.

54

Six of the "old timers" who had worked for Barney Lamm for almost a quarter of a century stopped guiding. Andy Keewatin took a full-time job on the reserve as a construction supervisor; Joe Loon continued to work at Ball Lake as a custodian; and the others "retired" from guiding to live on their old age pensions.

### The Politics of the Mercury Issue

The mercury triggered a political process whose rhetoric, posturing, and dialectic left an imprint on human values and hopes every bit as ruthless and destructive as the poison in the river.

"For even empty rhetoric generates aspirations among people who take it seriously. Aspirations kindle new and concrete hopes. But then the emptiness of the rhetoric is revealed in the paucity and perversion of the complementing programmes. Thus expectations are not fulfilled, and frustration and bitter anger result. The expression of this anger differs, depending on the intensity of the expectations and the extent of the gap between program and fulfillment."<sup>55</sup>

After more than a decade of hundreds of meetings, briefs, submissions, pleadings, formal and informal negotiations for "just compensation", for redress of damages to life and livelihood, the Grassy Narrows people have gained little more than platitudinous programs designed to placate. The fundamental inability of Government to deal holistically with a shattered society has remained as constant as the Indians' powerlessness to effect social justice. Throughout the decade of the 1970's and to this day, the political process has been governed by the perceived imperative on the part of both Government and industry to deny any responsibility for the present economic and social conditions in the Indian community and to avoid any course of action that might imply an acceptance of legal, moral, or social liability. In the context of such "principles" of political conduct, it is not surprising that the decade-long struggle has only reinforced the Indians' feeling of helplessness, apathy, and alienation.

An entire book can easily be devoted to the politics of the mercury issue. The story is both complex and fascinating for each actor on the

---

55

Arnold S. Kaufman, The Radical Liberal: The New Politics: Theory and Practice (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), p. 13. Quoted in D.H. Clairmont and Dennis Magill, Africville (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974).

political stage feels the need to create the illusion of righteousness and virtue to justify self-serving conduct. In relating the events and situations as they happened in time, our purpose is not to unmask "the villain in the play" but rather to unravel the curtain of illusions in order to reveal the nature of the society wherein the political drama takes place. We begin "at the beginning" in 1970.

Although commercial fishing was banned in May, some Ministers of the Ontario government believed sincerely that the mercury problem was a temporary one. George Kerr, Minister of the Environment, said in an interview over the Kenora radio (August 13, 1970) that it would take about 12 weeks for the fish to lower their mercury count. As a precaution, however, the Ministry of Natural Resources, which regulates sports fishing, sent letters to tourist camp operators on the English-Wabigoon river system recommending that guests and guides "fish for fun" only and not eat their catches of fish. Fish for Fun signs were posted along the shore warning people against consuming the fish. Later that year, the Premier of Ontario, John Robarts, met with tourist camp operators in Kenora to discuss governmental assistance to those that might want to relocate their camps or convert them to multi-activity tourist camps rather than exclusively fishing camps. The Government was aware that "if the problem is not resolved as proposed, as many as 400 people could be out of work in northwestern Ontario...with a probable loss of at least one-third of the tourist trade for this year which would translate into several million dollars of lost tourist revenue."<sup>56</sup> To offset damaging publicity about the existence of mercury in provincial waters, the Ministry of Tourism and Information was directed to spend an additional \$70,000 on advertising Ontario's fishing and lakeland country.

---

56

Press release of 4 February 1971 by Leo Bernier, then Member of the Provincial Parliament (M.P.P.) for Kenora, on the intention of the government to assist tourist camp operators affected by the mercury contamination.

The initial response to the mercury situation clearly indicated the direction in which the Government of Ontario was headed. When, in March of 1971, William Davis succeeded John Robarts as Premier of the Province, and Leo Bernier (former M.P.P. for Kenora) was appointed to the Cabinet as Minister of Natural Resources, the internal politics of the Conservative Cabinet became even more sharply focused on the delicate problem of "balancing" the risks to health posed by mercury against the potential loss of tourist revenue in the region. Ministers of different portfolios, representing different interests, contradicted each other publicly. While the Minister of Health, R.T. Potter, wrote strongly-worded letters to camp operators advising them not to eat the fish from contaminated waterways, the Minister of Natural Resources, Leo Bernier, announced that in his opinion, "the tourist could come up here [to Kenora] for three weeks, eat the fish two or three times a week, and be fine."<sup>57</sup> Certain Cabinet colleagues, like George Kerr and Rene Brunelle, agreed with Leo Bernier that the mercury pollution problem "had been overstated and exaggerated". In the early 1970's, the interests of the tourist industry were exceedingly well represented in the deliberations of the Ontario Cabinet.<sup>58</sup> While offering no assurances that risks to health did not exist, the Ministers of the Crown seemed to believe that the "public interest" would best be served by a concerted effort to downplay the seriousness of the mercury situation. Such a strategy, among other things, would also dampen public outcry against the Ontario government for "enabling" the industry to

---

57

Leo Bernier, interviewed on the Kenora radio, March 17, 1971.

58

The Fish for Fun posters came down in 1971 and never re-appeared; booklets for the sports fisherman with information about mercury were also quietly withdrawn from circulation. Rene Brunelle on April 26, 1971, suggested that the mercury problem had too much emphasis because "most of our lakes in the Precambrian Shield...have a high natural background of mercury". In order to avoid any implication of "compensation" to camp owners, after 1970 there was no further talk of "buying the camps out" or offering relocation assistance.

pollute the waterways in the first place.<sup>59</sup>

Individual tourist camp operators had to make their own decisions about subjecting their guests and guides to the health risks associated with mercury. Most of the camps were small family-run operations that could ill afford any major disruption in business. Assured by the government that the problem of mercury was not a long-term one, they elected to stay in business. There were two exceptions, however; as soon as Barney Lamm heard about the problem of mercury, he closed Ball Lake Lodge. Next year, 1971, Colin Myles closed his Separation Lake Camp. Barney Lamm became a major force in the politics of mercury and no description of events would be complete without reference to his role.

With unremitting determination, backed by considerable financial resources, Barney Lamm pursued the objective of achieving compensation for the closure of his famous lodge. To this end, he committed about \$50,000 to scientific investigation of the levels of mercury in fish; he gathered volumes of information on mercury and its effects. In 1971, he launched a \$3.7 million dollar lawsuit against Dryden Chemicals, claiming that amount in lost land, fixed assets, and foregone profits. He became a thorn in the side of the government Ministers, especially Leo Bernier, because he openly, loudly, and effectively spoke against the continued operation of the tourist camps. His cause was well publicized in Canada, especially in southern Ontario, because the press gave extensive coverage to the issue of mercury pollution. Certainly the publicity generated a formidable counter-weight to the government's desire to tread more softly on the issue. In the national media, many were well acquainted with Barney Lamm, for he provided pilots and aircraft to anyone who wanted to visit the area and the affected Indian reserves. In the mid-1970's, Barney Lamm forged

---

59

Dryden Chemicals, in its own defense, has charged that the company had "a license to pollute", since the government order to stop dumping mercury as effluent into the environment came only in 1970. In fact, mercury discharges from the plant did not end until October, 1975, when the company converted the old mercury cells to new permionic membrane cell technology. In short, there were no "legal" restrictions on the industry's use of mercury until new chlor-alkali regulations were announced in November 1971.



an alliance with Indian organizations and Indian leadership on the issue of forcing the Governments of Canada and Ontario to close the river to sports fishing. In the history of the mercury issue, Barney Lamm left no doubt that he was a "rich man with a cause"; doubts surfaced only whether his interests were "moral as well as financial".<sup>60</sup>

The key players in the political game in the early 1970-1973 period, then, were the Government of Ontario and Barney Lamm. While the former tried to minimize the gravity of the pollution problem, the latter tried to maximize it. Each side accused the other of misleading the public, distorting the truth, and hiding narrow political or pecuniary personal goals behind the thin veneer of "public" interest. The war of words certainly affected the people of Grassy Narrows and Whitedog for they did not know what to believe. In the first of many formal presentations to Government, in March of 1973 the Grassy Narrows Band stated:

"We have undergone many tests on the effects of mercury on our health and we are still in the dark as to what to do about the mercury problem".<sup>61</sup>

---

60

The people of Kenora and Dryden felt victimized by the relentless and overwhelmingly negative publicity given to the mercury issue in southern Ontario. They did not appreciate the unqualified adulation reserved by the press for Barney Lamm and his wife Marion, who were portrayed as champions of justice, protectors of the environment, and soul-mates to the Indians who had been poisoned by mercury. It is a fact that many prominent Toronto journalists and national media personalities enjoyed the hospitality and transportation services of Barney Lamm. For one reason or another, their perspective on the mercury issue was one-sided, uniformly anti-government, and sensationalist. The Kenora people suspected that in order to win public sympathy and political support for his own cause, Barney Lamm financed most of the unpleasant publicity, including the two books on mercury (No Safe Place and Grassy Narrows) and the major articles on the subject. As far as his "motives", people said he was "in it for the money", that if enough public pressure could be generated to force the government to close the river to sports fishing, then Barney Lamm would "win" his case in court and the sum of \$3.7 million tax-free dollars. People said that he closed his lodge because of financial and other difficulties; mercury was "an excuse" that came at a very opportune time.

61

Grassy Narrows Band, Brief to the Provincial Task Force on Mercury, March 8, 1973.

The Indian people were tested for mercury levels in blood and hair by provincial officials of the Ministry of Health in 1970, 1972, and in January 1973. Nobody in government, however, bothered to communicate the results of the tests back to the people who were supposedly at risk from mercury poisoning.<sup>62</sup> Instead, the provincial government sent out contradictory and confusing information about the hazards of mercury. Dr. Stopps, the head of the Environmental Health Services Branch of the Ontario Health Ministry, wrote one kind of letter to the camp owners, and another kind of letter to the Band Councils. He advised the camp owners, in no uncertain terms, that "fish from the English-Wabigoon river should not be eaten"; he advised the Band Councils that:

"From the measurements we made and our conversations with your people, we did not find any effect of mercury upon the people's health; however, it would be wise to tell those people with particularly high mercury levels to reduce the amount of fish they eat and we are making this recommendation in the letters sent to those few people who do have such levels."<sup>63</sup>

Ironically, at the time that Dr. Stopps wrote the above letter to the Band Councils, the people with high mercury levels had not yet been informed of test results. When the information was finally produced, it was contained in a form that the people could not understand, and it was delivered in an irresponsible manner.

---

62

On November 22, 1972 the Grassy Narrows Band wrote a letter to federal and provincial officials stating that the people were tired of being "used as specimens" and that the test results had never been communicated to them. Anxiety over the effects of mercury on health heightened in the community when a man called Tom Strong died, supposedly from a heart attack, in August 1972. He was known to be a heavy fish eater; he was 42 years of age. An inquest was held on January 26, 1973. According to various newspaper reports, Dr. Stopps suggested that the coroner's jury ignore testimony that a post-mortem blood sample from Mr. Strong showed a level of mercury of 224 ppb; he suggested that the sample had been contaminated by mercury in the pathology laboratory. This explanation did not rest well with the Indian people who did not have much faith in government to begin with. This incident reinforced suspicions that the provincial government was engaged in a "cover-up" of medical data.

63

Letter from Dr. Stopps to Colin Myles, November 16, 1972; letter to the Grassy Narrows Band Council, February 27, 1973.

On March 8, 1973, a Task Force appointed by the Government of Ontario came to Grassy Narrows to discuss the mercury situation. Just at the point when the officials were about to depart from the reserve, Dr. Stopps handed out sealed envelopes containing individually-addressed form letters that listed the level of mercury in blood. Indian people were left reading their mercury levels. No one had any idea what these levels meant; nothing had been explained to them. Those "at risk", with levels of mercury at 100 ppb or more, read a letter that said:

"From this measurement, and our conversation with you, there is no suggestion that mercury is affecting your health, but experts in the effect of mercury would agree that your level is somewhat too high and that, as a safety precaution, it would be wise to lower it."

Such a letter, with its gratuitous advice, did not illuminate the problem for people "still in the dark" about the medical and technical aspects of mercury contamination. Yet, its content and the way in which it was delivered illustrates a lack of compassion, an insensitivity to Indian people, and indeed to all people who might suffer anxiety and fear because they do not understand what is happening to their health. This situation of uncertainty and confusion was only compounded when federal government medical officials entered the scene. In what is now considered to be a classic piece of evidence with respect to government obfuscation on the subject of mercury's hazard to health, Dr. Peter Connop, Director of the Thunder Bay Zone for the Medical Services Branch, wrote to individual Grassy Narrows Band members as follows:

"Your level of mercury was found to be \_\_\_\_ parts per billion...Most of the band members have mercury levels that are higher than the people living in Southern Ontario who do not eat very much fish, but this is to be expected, and the mercury level does vary from person to person without necessarily having any effect on their health. We consider your mercury level to be in the range of measurements which would not affect your health.

We realize that the matter of mercury in the fish is a difficult one to understand and the experts are still learning more about mercury and its effects, but it is also important to remember that to keep healthy, it is necessary to eat balanced meals which contain some meat or fish as well as starch foods such as bread, and fats such as margarine or butter."<sup>64</sup>

Dr. Connop then advised people not to eat more fish than they usually did from the English river and to eat smaller fish rather than larger fish. In short, the message here was that people could eat as much fish from the contaminated river as they did in the past!

Unless one is an unrepentant cynic, it is hard to believe that the contradictory and confusing messages sent to Indian people by both governments were deliberate attempts to "cover-up" information in order to deflect, or at least delay, the issue of liability for damages. Yet, the fact is that any kind of information on mercury was extremely difficult to obtain from officials of the Government of Ontario in particular. There is some evidence, moreover, that federal government people were also aware of, and sensitive to, the issue of possible compensation.<sup>65</sup> The rigidity of provincial government practice in "keeping the lid on" mercury-related information was publicly recognized in the 1973 Federal Task Force on Organic Mercury in the Environment. The Task Force report stated:

"The free flow of information and data on mercury in the environment with the Province of Ontario is impeded for reasons that are not clearly understood."<sup>66</sup>

---

64

Letter from Dr. Peter J. Connop, Medical Services Branch, to Grassy Narrows Band members, March 17, 1975.

65

On March 15, 1973, Dr. Connop wrote to his Regional Director of Medical Services with the following interesting admonition: "If the Provincial Government does provide any financial compensation to these communities [of Whitedog and Grassy Narrows] it would be setting an extremely expensive precedent which will undoubtedly be brought out at regular intervals for every bit of smoke, bad weather or any other adverse factors which may affect the communities in the future."

66

Department of National Health and Welfare Canada, Task Force on Organic Mercury in the Environment: Final Report, 1973, p. 18.

The system of secrecy and suppression of documents relevant to the mercury issue prevailed until about 1974 when public pressure, media attention, and Indian political organizations finally brought about the release of certain key government reports. Among these was an Ontario government study of the levels of mercury in fish and the Report of the Provincial Interdepartmental Task Force on Mercury.

The Provincial Interdepartmental Task Force on Mercury was set up in November 1972. Composed of representatives from the Ministries of Health, Natural Resources, and Environment, it had a mandate to make recommendations to the Ontario Cabinet on steps to deal with the mercury problem. When members of the task force visited the Grassy Narrows reserve on March 8, 1973, they were presented with a brief that clearly identified the nature of the problem facing the Indian people:

"Our people have been relocated within the past decade and we are still suffering the effects of this social upheaval. Our housing is extremely inadequate; there have been ten house fires in the past year and on the average they have burnt to the ground within one-half hour. The dislocation in our lives has resulted in an excessive number of tragic deaths, violence, alcohol abuse, broken families, school drop-outs. All these are symptoms of a way of life now which is very much disrupted. In addition to the above situations, we also lost our commercial fishing and nearby guiding livelihoods owing to the mercury pollution."<sup>67</sup>

Recognizing that the problem was complex and that the solution had to be a comprehensive one, the Band Council decided not to bring to the Task Force any specific proposals that might be misunderstood as requests for compensation. Instead, the Band asked for "experts...not civil servants" in all walks of life who could help the community do research and plan a strategy for "coping with social upheaval".

---

<sup>67</sup>

Brief of the Grassy Narrows Band to the Provincial Interdepartmental Task Force on Mercury, March 8, 1973.

The response of the Task Force to the call for comprehensive assistance in re-building a broken community was to attempt to separate the consequences of the relocation, for which the federal government was responsible, from the specific claims directly related to mercury pollution. The final report of the task force concluded:

"It was evident that the Indian problems were complicated and that these were not just the result of mercury pollution, but the latter had created quite a disruption of their way of life, their employment habits and their livelihood; that some action was required to assist the Indians to replace the position guiding and commercial fishing had in their way of life before the two bands could hope to have anything approaching a stable community life."<sup>68</sup>

Although the task force proposed close cooperation between the federal and provincial governments, clearly the provincial government was not to be held responsible for deteriorating social conditions beyond those directly caused by mercury. As a result, the task force recommended that provincial assistance to the bands be limited to the following areas: the replacement of contaminated fish with an alternative food source; a search of alternative sites where the bands can resume commercial fishing operations; compensation to commercial fishermen; more in-depth health examinations; and, an information program designed to warn band members against eating contaminated fish. The task force recognized that the taking of fish for food should be prohibited and that "complete closing of the river system may be necessary for control purposes."

Following the submission of the Task Force report, Leo Bernier proudly announced to the Ontario legislature on April 27, 1973 that his Ministry of Natural Resources would assist the communities in dealing with mercury. He promised: that the bands would receive supplies of uncontaminated fish; that they would have access to uncontaminated lakes for commercial fishing; and that a special committee of officials would be set up

---

<sup>68</sup>

Government of Ontario, Fourth Report of the Mercury Task Force (1973), p. 13.

to plan a better future for Grassy Narrows and Whitedog. Although the Minister had good intentions, and although some of his promises were implemented, the provincial response in 1973 and for the rest of the decade would be limited to purely remedial measures of no long-term significance.<sup>69</sup> The provincial position would remain governed by the principle that "Indians are a federal government responsibility"; and, the political response would be directed by the need to avoid any action which might be interpreted as, and thus set a precedent for, compensation for the damages of industrial pollution.<sup>70</sup> By 1975, it became clear that neither the Government of Ontario nor the Government of Canada was prepared to acknowledge responsibility for the social upheaval on the two reserves, let alone undertake coordinated and comprehensive measures towards social and economic reconstruction. The situation was ripe for confrontation. As a background to the political struggle of the mid-1970's, it is necessary to review the activity of the federal government in the 1970-1975 period.

As a way of indicating his interest in the mercury issue, the Minister of National Health and Welfare, Marc Lalonde, appointed a federal task force on April 3, 1973. This group reviewed past efforts to test mercury levels in individuals and observed that,

---

69

Government action on the task force recommendations was delayed until 1975, when the province placed large commercial freezers on both reserves and stocked them with a supply of uncontaminated fish. The Grassy Narrows Band proposed that the government purchase privately-held commercial fishing licences on Maynard Lake and Oak Lake, which were not on the river system, and transfer these to the Band so that commercial fishing could resume; nothing came of this, and no alternative non-contaminated lakes were identified for commercial fishing. In January 1976, a Coordinator, Jeff Perkins, was appointed with supposedly "special powers" to organize provincial assistance to Grassy Narrows and Whitedog. In March, Jeff Perkins resigned because he could not by-pass entrenched bureaucratic procedures. Thus, by early 1976, only one of the task force recommendations had been implemented.

70

The Federal Task Force of 1973 concluded: "Indications are that the Government of Ontario is hesitant to discuss the question of compensation for lost economic opportunities, though it is understood that favourable considerations may be given to requests from the Indian people for extensions to pulpwood cutting areas and to the provision of alternative mercury-free commercial fishing grounds". Health and Welfare Canada, Task Force on Organic Mercury, p. 9.

"Previous mercury testing programs have missed a vital sub-group of the Indian population, namely the hunters and guides and their families who are frequently absent from their communities. Future mercury-testing programs must take this high-risk group into account..."<sup>71</sup>

The group identified the "most serious consequences of mercury pollution" to be not medical, but "economic, social and cultural". It described the federal government's approach to the problem as "fragmented and lacking cohesion". In response to the final report of the task force, the government established in 1973 the Federal Standing Committee on Mercury in the Environment. Composed of representatives from Health and Welfare, DIAND, and the Environment, its mandate was to facilitate the exchange of information, coordinate the federal response to the problem, and advise deputy ministers as to the appropriate actions to be taken. A liaison person from the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB), the Indian political body representing associations across Canada, was to be included in all the Committee's deliberations.

The Standing Committee met only twice in 1973, once in 1974, and three times in 1975. According to its Chairman, its function was neither to investigate specific problems nor to solve them; the Committee was only supposed "to coordinate" and "to analyze the [scientific] information received."<sup>72</sup> Beset by internal squabbles among its members as to which federal government department had a mandate to deal with the problems caused by mercury, the Committee accomplished nothing of value.

---

<sup>71</sup>

Ibid., p. 15. The final report of the task force recommended that the residents of Whitedog and Grassy Narrows be recognized "at risk" and that surveillance measures (hair and blood tests) continue, especially for the sub-group that had previously been omitted from testing. "As a matter of priority", it was essential for the federal government "to institute a program of social and economic development" in both communities. The task force report made no reference at all to the disruptive impact of the relocation.

<sup>72</sup>

Letter from the Chairman of the Standing Committee, E. Somers, to Clive Linklater of the NIB, May 2, 1975. The point was made that the Committee did not have a problem-solving capacity.



Not only were intra-governmental communications at an impasse, but communication between levels of government within the same department, and between government and the Indian people, was either garbled or non-existent.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, the Standing Committee would have continued as the "showpiece" of token federal government effort to deal with the mercury problem had it not been for two developments which galvanized the Department of National Health and Welfare and the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) out of complacency and into action.

The first development was the organization of a Mercury Team within the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) in August 1974. Under a grant from Health and Welfare, the Mercury Team was to coordinate research on mercury contamination that, by this time, was affecting the Cree Indians of northwestern Quebec as well as the Ojibwa of northwestern Ontario. The NIB hired Alan Roy as research coordinator. With the political weight of the NIB behind him, and with the tenacity of a bulldog, Alan Roy pursued government bureaucrats for information on their programs. He found that there had been minimal communication with the Indian bands, that both Health and Welfare and DIAND were creating "misleading impressions as to the seriousness of [their] activities in dealing with mercury contamination in northwestern Ontario", and that "no programs of a realistic nature" had been put in place to deal with the key problems of health education, an alternative food supply, compensation for loss of employment

---

73

The state of intra-governmental communications as late as November 1974 (four years after mercury was discovered) is well illustrated by a single line from an internal DIAND memorandum. The Director-General of the Ontario region, H. Rodine, wrote to headquarters to say that "Actions taken [with respect to mercury] by the Department of National Health and Welfare Unknown". Telex to John McGilp, November 28, 1974. Within DIAND, the representative to the Standing Committee, H. Rogers, admitted frankly that the Department had no policy on mercury, and that communications between headquarters, the region, the district, and the Indian people were the major problem.

and long-term economic development.<sup>74</sup> On February 21, 1975, he wrote to the Assistant Deputy Minister of DIAND that the entire approach of the federal government, particularly the Indian Affairs Branch, had been "painfully inadequate in relation to the various recommendations made by various task forces." The political pressure on the federal government from the NIB in 1974-75 was reinforced by a wave of media attention to the issue and the enormous political impact of the visit of the Japanese (Minamata) doctors to Grassy Narrows and Whitedog in March 1975.

The second development, then, was the publicity given by the national media to the mercury issue. The November 1974 airing of a radio broadcast on CBC's As It Happens, which was sharply critical of both Governments and Industry, sparked a wave of letters from angry citizens to the Prime Minister's office and to the office of Judd Buchanan, the Minister of Indian Affairs. People demanded to know why the politicians had suppressed information and why so little had been done over four years to deal with the problem. Media attention continued unabated during 1975, helping to send politicians scurrying to formulate "appropriate responses" to the allegations of misconduct or indifference levelled against them in the press. The invitation, extended by the NIB, to the Japanese doctors of Kumamoto University to come to the reserves and undertake clinical examinations was widely interpreted by the press as a thinly-veiled vote of no confidence, on the part of Indian people, in government-run medical testing programmes. The wide publicity given to Dr. Harada and his

---

74

These concerns were voiced emphatically in a letter from Alan Roy to John Reid, Member of Parliament for Kenora, May 14, 1975. In response to a request for information from Mr. Reid, DIAND had stated that its officials had intensified their efforts to find employment for the people of Grassy Narrows; Health and Welfare had written that its officials were doing follow-up on medical tests, hiring more staff, running a pregnant female and neo-natal sampling program, and studying the effect of mercury on cats. On closer investigation, it turned out that DIAND was not doing anything out of the ordinary to assist the band; and, the program of Health and Welfare still did not meet the requirements for health education at the community level.

colleagues also angered provincial politicians.<sup>75</sup> Yet it was not long after the visit of the Japanese doctors that Health and Welfare approached Dr. Tom Clarkson and asked him to mount a comprehensive and continuing program of testing for mercury on the two reserves. Obviously, the visit of Dr. Harada and his colleagues had more than a symbolic effect. In May 1975, the first signs of activity began to appear from DIAND. Under pressure to make a report to the Standing Committee, ideas of "what to do about mercury" were hastily conceived and implemented "on paper" by all levels of the DIAND bureaucracy.<sup>76</sup> In letters to concerned citizens, the office of the Minister of Indian Affairs misrepresented the situation by portraying loosely-formed ideas, conceived a month previously, as ongoing

---

75

Leo Bernier apparently called the Japanese doctors "a bunch of troubadors". Ontario Health Minister, Frank Miller, told a reporter that Dr. Harada was "a psychiatrist, not a neurologist", and was suspect because of his left-wing political views. It is fair to say that some Ontario Cabinet Ministers felt that the Japanese doctors were "predisposed" to find cases of mercury poisoning in Ontario. By this time, moreover, the issue had become politicized; some felt the Japanese were adding fuel to the fire of political confrontation.

76

On the day before DIAND was to make a presentation to the Standing Committee, John McGilp, the Director of Operations in Ottawa, wrote to Howard Rodine, Regional Director-General in Ontario as follows: "I am sure you will agree that we need to be able to indicate that some positive action as well as some appropriate planning is taking place in Indian Affairs". DIAND "policy" was to be shaped by two concerns: the need to find and make accessible alternative sources of protein; and, the need to find employment opportunities to replace lost jobs. (Letter dated May 15, 1975). On May 16, the Department was "able to indicate" to the Standing Committee that it had (miraculously) accomplished the following: (1) initiated a program of economic support which would enable the Indians of the two reserves [Grassy Narrows and Whitedog] to fish in uncontaminated lakes close to their reserves; (2) designed and implemented a Community Education Program; (3) initiated discussions with the two bands on long-term economic development; and (4) gathered a "cadre of specialists" to deal with the mercury issue. Report of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to the Interdepartmental Committee on Mercury in the Environment, May 16, 1975.

It is noteworthy that although none of the above "programs" had yet been discussed at the community level, let alone initiated, it must have seemed very important for DIAND bureaucrats to be perceived as "doing something about mercury" by other bureaucrats in the federal system.

programs.<sup>77</sup> The sense of urgency accompanying protestations of concern on the part of DIAND officials for the situation at Grassy Narrows and Whitedog was undoubtedly inspired by a series of events in 1975, each of which was very well covered by the mass media.

After the visit of the Japanese doctors in March, the Minamata Patients' Alliance invited representatives from both reserves to come to Minamata "and to see what the dread of mercury is". On July 16, with the organizational assistance of the NIB, seven Indian people left for Japan. They were accompanied by Aileen Smith (co-author, with Eugene Smith, of Minamata), Dr. Peter Newberry, (a Quaker physician), Jill Torrie (a researcher for the NIB), and Barney Lamm. The federal government paid for the air fares of Aileen Smith and the Indians.<sup>78</sup> In August, Japanese doctors and scientists returned to Grassy Narrows and Whitedog to perform more medical tests. Then, they took part in a cross-Canada tour to familiarize the Canadian public with mercury pollution. In September, delegates from the Minamata Disease Patients' Alliance came to Canada, visited the two reserves, and participated in demonstrations in Kenora and before the Ontario Legislature in Ontario. The Japanese encouraged the Indians to be much more militant in their demands for compensation; they

---

77

In file no. 487/17-10 of DIAND for 1975 one can find copies of the letters written by the Minister's special assistant to concerned citizens about the mercury issue. The letters state that: first, DIAND was running a community education and information program (see below); second, that DIAND had "located a few non-contaminated lakes and is assisting the Indians who are harvesting those lakes and catching 'clean' fish (actually, this was being attempted by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, not DIAND); and, that DIAND was "considering schemes for making wild game and cattle products more accessible" (these schemes never went beyond internal bureaucratic memoranda).

78

The expenditure was considered a part of the "community education program". The funds were justified on the grounds that the trip to Japan would "sensitize a group of Indian leaders to the seriousness of mercury poisoning in order that they could return to their reserves and communicate directly with people to avoid eating contaminated fish". Telex from P.B. Lesaux, Assistant Deputy Minister, DIAND, to the Canadian Embassy in Tokyo, July 22, 1975. This trip to Japan, however, was apparently the only tangible evidence of any DIAND-sponsored "community education program" on the two mercury reserves in 1975.

also urged them to press the governments for an epidemiological study on the health effects of mercury.<sup>79</sup> By the end of 1975, there was no question that "the politics of mercury" had entered a new phase. The desultory years were over; the next period would be one of tremendous polarization, politicization, and belligerence. For the Indian people, it would be an ordeal beyond imagining for they would discover that they had only been pawns in a game of high stakes that was supposed to be played for their benefit.

From the beginning of 1976 to May 1977, the dominant issue in the political arena was the issue of closing the river to sports fishing. This issue welded together the concerns for health with the demands for compensation. On the one hand, the cessation of sports fishing and the closure of all fishing camps on the river system would protect Indian guides and their families from any further consumption of contaminated fish.<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, the action of closure would reaffirm the gravity of the pollution and force both industry and Government to compensate the owners of the fishing camps and lodges. It was always assumed that as part of this settlement some compensation would be awarded to Indian people for the loss of guiding employment. Precisely because these two objectives of health and compensation could be met by one outcome, the issue invited the attention of a formidable array of interested parties, each of which desired to be perceived as an advocate of the "Indians' cause". In order to understand the political alignments on this issue, it is necessary to review the context in which this issue was debated.

---

79

Because the symptoms of mercury poisoning are non-specific, they can be easily attributed to alcoholism and other maladies. The objective of an epidemiological study is to determine whether the occurrence of particular signs and symptoms associated with mercury poisoning is significantly higher among the exposed population than among a control group that has not been exposed to mercury. A much higher incidence of neurological symptoms of damage in the exposed population would show that mercury is indeed the causal factor.

80

The guides eat the fish when they prepare shore lunches for the tourist sports fishermen. Often, they take spare fish home to their families. By their example, they minimize the risk of eating contaminated fish for other Indian families.

By the beginning of 1976, Grassy Narrows was in a state of turbulence. The people were angry. They had had enough of the scores of newspaper men, freelance journalists, photographers, "do-gooders", and researchers who came to get the most sensational story on their predicament. They were tired of being a "fishbowl" under the glaring lights of television cameras. They resented having the horror of their community's social pathology exposed to the rest of the world. They were confused as to the real danger to their health presented by mercury, because the media invariably described mercury as the slow killer that was already crippling them and causing their social violence.<sup>81</sup> In addition, the people were weary of the promises of assistance, the inquiries of task forces, the visits of government Ministers, the probes of doctors; absolutely nothing had been accomplished in the community either to help them understand the nature of the pollution or to assist them in coping with the social upheaval. The escalation of welfare payments had only made things worse. As a result, people lost faith in their leaders and

---

81

The extent of distortion in the media's coverage of the mercury issue is staggering. With few exceptions, the media focused on two related themes: first, that mercury was killing the people of Grassy Narrows and Whitedog; second, that all their social problems were derived from mercury. The media wanted to believe this because the story made such sensational copy. A typical article on mercury had headlines like "Mercury - The Indians' Deadliest Enemy". A typical story painted a portrait of catastrophe; a typical description ran as follows: "Indians...kept in the dark for three years about a health hazard that scientists and doctors say should have killed many of them. Tests...revealed dangerously high mercury levels, in many cases 40 to 150 times that of the average Canadian and well above the level at which neurological damage begins...The mercury levels found in Indians are as high or higher than those found in 36 fishermen killed by mercury poisoning in Japan...the autopsies on the dead fishermen in Minamata showed mercury levels to be 144 to 200 ppb." Winnipeg Free Press, March 10, 1973.

In the light of data presented in the discussion of the medical aspects of mercury, one can see the extent to which such a report departs from fact. Yet, many newspaper clippings on mercury found their way into the Band office at Grassy Narrows. It is no wonder then that people were very confused as to what was happening to their bodies. The other aspect of distortion was the link, in the media, between mercury and violent death, between mercury and social problems. The media suggested that mercury was responsible for "character and personality changes...and for behavioural problems resulting in violent death." Radio broadcast, CBC As It Happens, November 6, 1974.

their leaders lost faith in themselves. As Simon Fobister was later to explain:

"There was a crisis of leadership after mercury. People could see no solution being presented to them by the Chief. This put the Chiefs under too much stress and they couldn't cope. A lot of problems were caused right at the beginning when governments were trying to cover up the mercury. People were very confused."<sup>82</sup>

By the mid-1970's, then, Grassy Narrows was ripe for intervention. It was demoralized and its leadership discredited. Intervention came in the form of lawyers who presented themselves as left-wing radicals; it came with the infiltration of the American Indian Movement (AIM) into the Ojibway Warrior Society; it came with the ever-increasing influence of the Treaty #3 organization (the body which represents the 23 Bands which signed Treaty #3 in 1873) in internal Band affairs. And it came in the form of money; in 1976, the two mercury Bands under the aegis of Treaty #3 received \$121,000 to begin research on the feasibility of taking the polluter, REED Paper Ltd., to court. The lawyers formed the Anti-Mercury Ojibway Group (AMOG), an incorporated entity with Band members from Whitedog and Grassy Narrows on the Board of Directors. In November 1976, at the age of 19 and with no working or leadership experience behind him, Simon Fobister entered the political arena as the new Chief of Grassy Narrows.

At the same time, significant changes had taken place in the Indian Affairs Branch of DIAND. A new Assistant Deputy Minister, Cam Mackie, was appointed. Inside the federal system, his appointment was taken as a signal of a more "activist" and progressive approach by DIAND to Indian matters.<sup>83</sup> As a strong believer in placing Indians in positions of respon-

---

<sup>82</sup> Simon R. Fobister, January 4, 1979.

<sup>83</sup> In the federal system, Cam Mackie had been closely associated with the innovative programs of the 1960's: the Company of Young Canadians (CYC), the Opportunities for Youth (OFY), and the Local Initiatives Program (LIP). He was the "new guard" of young, socially-conscious civil servants. A description of the interplay of personalities, structures, and policy within DIAND is given by J. Rick Ponting and Roger Gibbins, Out of Irrelevance (Toronto: Butterworths and Company, 1980).

sibility within DIAND, Cam Mackie appointed Fred Kelly (former President of Treaty #3) as the new Director-General of Indian Affairs, Ontario Region. A new alignment emerged in the federal government, one that was to be very supportive of certain positions deemed to be in the interest of the two mercury-affected Bands.<sup>84</sup>

With the formation of AMOG under the controlling influence of Treaty #3 and the lawyers, there was now a spearhead for more narrowly-focused political action. The NIB Mercury Team associated itself with AMOG and closely coordinated its activities with those of AMOG. A constant presence in AMOG-related affairs and in all AMOG meetings was Barney Lamm. His interest in what the Bands were doing was understandable; after all, he too had a case in court against the polluter. Furthermore, he had close friends and "historic connections" with the new Director-General of the Ontario region, the non-Indian advisers at the NIB, the AMOG co-ordinator, and with certain individuals at the Band level.

In 1976, AMOG, Treaty #3, and the NIB began a concerted campaign to press the Governments of Canada and Ontario to close the English-Wabigoon river system to sports fishing. Extensive coverage in the press supported the Indians' position. Barney Lamm generously supported the Indians who took part in important political meetings on this issue.<sup>85</sup> At the same time, the Chiefs were instructed "what to say and where to sign on the dotted line". They were told that aside from safeguarding the health of

---

84

AMOG and the litigation feasibility study grants were shepherded through Indian Affairs under the collective stewardship of Cam Mackie and Fred Kelly. Fred Kelly chose Donald Colborne to be the lawyer for the Bands and the Co-ordinator of AMOG.

85

It was common knowledge at Grassy Narrows that Barney Lamm used to give out money to the Indian people before they left to attend meetings in Ottawa or Toronto on the issue of closing the river. I myself witnessed an incident where Barney Lamm pulled out a huge bankroll of \$20 bills and gave a few to each of the Indians "to have a good time". This was in the Westbury Hotel in Toronto in early 1977.



future generations, closing the river will bring many other benefits:

"When the river system is closed, the government will be forced to quickly compensate the people who made a living off the river system...to establish alternate sources of employment...set up new industries. A closed river system gives the two communities an excellent lever to pry out of the governments the programs and jobs they owe us for allowing an industry to wreck the waterway.

If the river system is closed, it will be much easier to win a law suit against REED International. When the river system is shut down, REED will have a much harder time proving that their pollution is not the cause of all the unemployment and ill health we see on the reserves."<sup>86</sup>

At the federal level, the Ministers of DIAND, Health and Welfare, and Environment supported the closure of the river. The Minister of Fisheries agreed with the concept as a useful step in reducing the consumption of contaminated fish by native people; he refused, however, to intervene in a matter which he considered to be a provincial responsibility. At the provincial level, Stephen Lewis and Stuart Smith, leaders of the two Opposition parties in the Ontario legislature, both demanded that the Ontario government close the river. Their vocal support of the Indians' cause was perhaps influenced by the fact that the government was going into an election in June 1977. Inside the Ontario Cabinet, George Kerr, Minister of the Environment, was the only one to publicly advocate closure. His Cabinet colleagues, particularly the Ministers of Natural Resources and Resource Development (Leo Bernier and Rene Brunelle), worried about the negative consequences of closure.

The negative impacts of closure were determined to be as follows: first, closure would cripple the tourist industry, one of the area's principle sources of livelihood. It had been guess-estimated that

---

86

Text of an AMOG statement prepared for the Chiefs entitled "Reasons why the Wabigoon-English River System should be closed".

closure would mean a loss to the industry, in 1975 dollars, of \$2 million in direct annual revenue; a "ripple effect" in the economy of the region would add a revenue loss of \$40 million dollars. Second, there would be a loss of some 300 jobs, 46 of which were Indian-held guiding jobs; the government felt it would have great difficulty providing alternative employment. Third, it would cost the Ontario government \$5-10 million to buy out lodge owners forced to close their operations; a disproportionate chunk of this compensation would go to lodge owners and not to Indian guides.<sup>87</sup> Fourth, although closure was a positive step in reducing the health hazard of mercury, it was not a guarantee that the Indian people would stop consuming contaminated fish. Fifth, closure was considered to be unenforceable. Finally, closure of the English-Wabigoon system would set a precedent for government action on all waterways contaminated by industrial poisons.

The issue of closure came to a head at a meeting of the Canada-Ontario Mercury Committee on April 5, 1977.<sup>88</sup> At that meeting, the Department of Health and Welfare, in conjunction with the provincial Ministry of Health, offered to conduct a thorough epidemiological study at Grassy Narrows and Whitedog to answer once and for all the thorny questions surrounding the effect of mercury on human health. Acting on the advice of AMOG lawyers, the Chiefs of the two Bands took the position that they

---

87

Behind closed doors, several Ontario Cabinet Ministers apparently worried about the possible undue influence of Barney Lamm on the issue of closing the river. It was widely recognized that he had the most to gain, in terms of financial compensation, from closure. As one (federal) civil servant put it: "Many believed that Barney was just using the Indians to clean up on a lot of money as a result of the closing of the river. Certainly Leo Bernier thought so. That was part of the thinking of the Ontario Cabinet and government when they saw Barney putting so much pressure on the Indians and on AMOG to close the river."

88

The Canada-Ontario Committee on Mercury was set up in 1976 to co-ordinate federal and provincial responses to the mercury situation. It was a high-level committee composed of the Assistant Deputy Ministers of DIAND and Health and Welfare (C. Mackie and C.E. Caron) and the Assistant Deputy Minister of Natural Resources of the Ontario Government (A.J. Herridge).

will accept the study only on condition that the Governments close the river to sports fishing. Later, Simon Fobister was to describe his consent to tie the study to closing the river as "the greatest mistake I ever made when I was Chief". In May, 1977, Frank Miller, the Minister of Natural Resources, announced the decision of the Ontario Cabinet: the river would remain open to sports fishing. In the same month, the federal Government decided to do an epidemiological study on the Cree Indians of northwestern Quebec who were also at risk from mercury poisoning.

It is not necessary at this point to discuss the merits of closing the river. What is significant is that the issue, prior to late 1977, had never been debated at the community level. In the crucial years when the issue was being engineered through the most rarified levels of the political system, and noble positions were being taken on the Indians' behalf, no one stopped to ask whether or not the people had been consulted. It was assumed that the Chief spoke for the people, yet all around there was evidence that the influence of AMOG, and AMOG's co-operators, was paramount. Even if AMOG's lawyers were operating under the best of intentions, they did not realistically assess the impact of closure on the Indian guides. These people would have been thrown out of work in one of the last sectors of productive employment available to them. They did not consider the difficulty, especially in light of the government's notoriously poor record of job creation, of replacing guiding work (and guiding as a way of life) with alternative employment in a depressed region with exceedingly limited development possibilities. They did not consider any alternatives to closure that might accomplish the desired objective of minimizing the health risks posed by mercury, particularly for guides and their families.<sup>89</sup> By training and inclination, the

---

89

Among possible alternatives for minimizing the health risks of guiding were the following: first, government could offer subsidies to camp owners for the provision of box lunches to guides so that they would not have to eat contaminated fish on a daily basis when guiding. (Because the exposure of tourists is brief, the consumption of contaminated fish is not as great a health hazard to them as it is for guides). Second, government could legislate and/or regulate the provision of box lunches to Indian guides; it could make the provision of alternative lunches for guides a condition for the renewal of licences to operate camps on the river system.

lawyers who served the Indian people saw the greater financial rewards that might accrue from winning a precedent-setting lawsuit against a corporate polluter, the chances for which would have been appreciably enhanced by the closure of the river. By ideological persuasion, they wanted to bring the government to its knees and make it pay for allowing the industry to pollute. To single out the AMOG lawyers for special attention, however, is to lose sight of the point that every actor on the political stage had particular interests to advance and protect on the issue of closure, interests which were not grounded in direct knowledge of the community and its situation.

In the late autumn of 1977, the issue of closure was finally debated at the community level. After hearing impassioned arguments for closure presented by Donald Colborne, the AMOG Coordinator and legal adviser, the Band membership overwhelmingly voted against closing the river. Some people were angry when they found out that the Grassy Narrows Band had "officially" demanded closure since early 1976; they had known nothing about it and they wanted to know "who was behind it". According to Bill Fobister:

"We never said we wanted the river to close. Indian Affairs and AMOG wanted the river to close, they told us to say that. There are only five or six people on this reserve that are for closing the river; they are not guides either. The guides don't want the river closed because guiding is their life. Where are they going to find jobs for six months of the year? If it is so important not to eat fish in shore lunches, then why don't the lodge owners supply them with box lunches of cold meat? That would help, but closing the river will not help the future of the reserve."<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup>

Bill Fobister, November 18, 1977. "Indian Affairs" refers, in this connection, to Fred Kelly. As Regional Director-General, he had considerable influence and urged the federal government to support closure.

Questions began to be asked about the role of Barney Lamm in AMOG.<sup>91</sup> People openly began to question his motives in closing down Ball Lake Lodge. Tom Payash, who worked for Barney Lamm for 25 years and considered him "a pretty good employer" voiced his doubts as follows:

"The truth is that Barney was flying his guests off the river system most of the time. He was flying to Stork Lake, Sydney, Wilcox. Cost \$15 per person; boats would already be there, on those lakes. If Barney was not using the polluted river for fishing, then why did he close the lodge? That's what I don't understand. He also used to go up into the Arctic, to Great Bear Lake. The guides would go up there too; it was great fishing up there.

When we were guiding for Barney, we had everything in the lunchbox, bacon and eggs, canned meat, pickles, jam, bread. It was first-class all the way. The guests had to pay for the lunch everyday whether they ate it or not. That's the way Barney made money. Barney could have been open about it, about mercury. The guides could eat the lunch that the guests paid for anyway, instead of fish. He could give guides the choice. Guides have to watch out for themselves. Barney could have kept the lodge open."<sup>92</sup>

According to Andy Keewatin, who did support the closing of the river for reasons of health, Barney Lamm was flying his guests off the river system because the wealthy tourists who came for "wilderness fishing" did not wish to be followed around by "pork'n beaners" who entered the river system by road. When the roads were opened, Ball Lake

---

<sup>91</sup>

After the Band voted against closing the river, Barney Lamm came to Grassy Narrows to convince people to get the Band Council to reverse its decision. About the same time, in Whitedog, people were saying that Isaac Mandamin, the Chief, had been bought off by Barney Lamm with a boat and motor. In fact, soon after, Isaac Mandamin was replaced as Chief by Roy McDonald. After the election of Roy McDonald, the Whitedog Band Council also decided that closing the river was not in the Band's long-term interest.

<sup>92</sup>

Tom Payash, March 14, 1979. The fact that Barney Lamm was flying off the river system before mercury was discovered was confirmed also by Steve Loon (March 12, 1979), George A. Keewatin (March 12, 1979) and Andy Keewatin (January 4, 1979). All these guides had worked for Barney Lamm for 20 years or more.

did not attract "the same quality of customers; Barney's clientele began to change...the rich people wanted to go up north on the arctic." The English-Wabigoon area became "middle-class" and the wealthy did not want to rub shoulders with the people who drove in with their trailers and campers and their noisy children. Ball Lake lost its exclusivity; its clientele, the Hollywood millionaires and Texas oil barons, began to look elsewhere. Whether or not financial difficulties and the extensive renovations required to the sewage system posed additional strains on the operations of the lodge cannot be known for certain. What is known is that,

"Barney wanted to sell Ball Lake Lodge. A group of men came one summer to buy it, but they said that the price was too high, that Barney was asking too much for it. This was before anyone heard of mercury."<sup>93</sup>

In the end, many Grassy Narrows people didn't know whether or not to believe that Barney really closed his lodge in order to protect the health of "his boys" (as he used to call his Indian guides). At one point, he offered to sell the lodge to the Grassy Narrows Band for \$250,000 so that "the Indian people could run it".<sup>94</sup> Torn between old loyalties to a "pretty good employer" and historic distrust of provincial politicians and bureaucrats, the Band Council felt caught in a maelstrom of uncertainty and apprehension as to "who" was truly fighting for them and "why". As the Chief was later to put it,

---

<sup>93</sup> John Swain, March 23, 1979. John Swain guided at Ball Lake Lodge for 22 years.

<sup>94</sup> When a possibility of a financial settlement for economic losses sustained by the Grassy Narrows Band from mercury pollution was under discussion in the mediation process, Barney Lamm met with the Chief and Band Council and proposed that the Band use their compensation money to buy out Ball Lake Lodge.

"We were manipulated. We were taken in and used by people who wanted the river closed for their own reasons. We were exploited. We lost the epidemiological study. After we decided against closing the river, the champions of the Indians disappeared. Now we have nothing. We have to start all over."<sup>95</sup>

The Indians' experience with "the outside society" on the issue of the closing of the river had not been a happy one. They were overwhelmed by the public attention. In the end, the experience served to reinforce the distrust of "outsiders", especially those who "came to help". In this environment, people and programs were often defeated before they had a chance to make a contribution. Yet, paradoxically, in 1976-1977 there appeared the first signs of movement towards re-building the economy of Grassy Narrows.

On October 31, 1975, the Chiefs of Whitedog and Grassy Narrows met with the Ministers of Health, Environment, and Natural Resources (Frank Miller, George Kerr, and Leo Bernier, respectively) of the Ontario Government. The Grassy Narrows Band presented the Ministers with a detailed, 17-page brief which spelled out the ways in which economic developmental assistance might be provided. Central to reconstruction was the need to create employment:

"The people of our reserve are anxious to exchange welfare cheques for salary cheques...We recognize that through employment lies the key to the revitalization of a solid social fabric for our reserve and its people."<sup>96</sup>

On November 21, the Chiefs met with Judd Buchanan, the Minister of Indian Affairs. They emphasized again that employment was of absolute priority in reducing social chaos, and they rejected his offer of relocation of the

---

95

Simon Fobister, January 6, 1979.

96

Brief of the Grassy Narrows Band to the meeting of provincial Ministers, October 31, 1975.

reserves to an uncontaminated area.<sup>97</sup> On November 26, Mr. Buchanan invited his colleagues in the federal Cabinet, the Ministers of Health and Environment (Marc Lalonde and Jeanne Sauvé) to a meeting in Ottawa with the provincial Ministers of Health, Natural Resources and Environment. At that meeting, all participants agreed on the need for joint action and intergovernmental cooperation on the development of "special programs" for the two mercury reserves. Out of this consensus at the political level emerged the Canada-Ontario Mercury Committee of high-ranking civil servants from both governments, which met for the first time in January 1976. With unprecedented swiftness, both governments agreed to a special "work for welfare" program; the program was announced by a letter dated January 23, 1976, from Judd Buchanan to Chief Simon Fobister:

[We intend] "to develop a type of program whereby work could be assigned to the employable residents of the reserve, who would then be renumerated by using welfare funds and by subsidizing any shortfall through other sources. It would be a type of 'work-for-pay' program or a flexible community development program to replace welfare for all those able to work."

---

97

During 1975, Indian Affairs officials were giving serious consideration to the relocation of Whitedog and Grassy Narrows. In a "strictly confidential memorandum" of October 27, 1975, from P. Jacobs (Kenora District office) to H. Rodine (Ontario Regional Director), it was recognized that the Indians might reject the relocation because they had little faith in the ability of DIAND to safeguard their interests, given past performance. The promises of the first relocation had been broken. In a rare insight into the effects of the previous relocation, the memo states:

"To date the consequences of the previous relocation have not been solved. The violence and apathy evident on these reserves [Whitedog and Grassy Narrows] are at least as much a result of the relocations as of loss of traditional livelihood... While this [social] disintegration has been aggravated by lost income after closing of the fisheries, it was present following the first relocation."

This statement from a district staff member of DIAND is the only statement on record that anybody within DIAND recognized the disastrous consequences of the "earlier" relocation. As had been predicted, the Chiefs of both Bands rejected the relocation offer made by the DIAND Minister in November, 1975.



This program was implemented in 1976 and became known as the "Band Work Program". For all its shortcomings, it was an important first-step in the right direction. In July, DIAND officials were able to inform the Minister that:

"For this year, approximately \$920,060, including \$125,000 in supplementary funds, will be expended to provide new employment on the two reserves for approximately 125 people. At Grassy Narrows, approximately \$480,060 will be expended to provide 65 man-years of employment."<sup>99</sup>

At the federal level in 1976, two other Committees were hastily created to give the impression of a positive, determined approach to the mercury situation. The Federal Committee on Nutritional Alternatives to Fish and the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Forestry both contributed various ideas on how to deal with the mercury problem. At one point, the government considered creating a national park in the area, but this idea was quietly shelved in late 1976.

Not to be undone in terms of manifesting a commitment to some sort of development assistance, the Province of Ontario also provided funds for special programs. The amount of assistance, and the areas where funds were expended, can be seen from Table III:5. Together, both governments mobilized sufficient funds to provide employment for a majority of the male labour force in 1976 and 1977 in a variety of short-term, remedial, and "make-work" projects.<sup>100</sup> The predominant concern of both Bands, however,

---

99

Internal DIAND memorandum to Judd Buchanan, DIAND Minister, July 1976. File no. 487/17-10 for 1976.

100

These projects, which lasted anywhere from 3 weeks to 3 months, involved different "community improvement" types of activities, for example, home repairs, brush clearing, the construction of boardwalks, garbage pick-up, and so on. They also involved tree planting and cone picking, a sawmill and pulp operation, and a community garden. For a year or so, the Band tried manufacturing canoes, but this project did not meet with much success. DIAND appointed special staff in the Kenora district office to assist in planning and implementing these projects; in 1976, a forestry advisor was also hired for Grassy Narrows.

was long-term industrial development and comprehensive socio-economic assistance. This was brought to the attention of Cam Mackie, the newly-appointed Assistant Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs:

"The history of requests from the two Bands is one of the Bands viewing their needs from a community focus with a comprehensive framework in which all parts inter-relate, and being forced to deal with specific separate projects because of the type of response received from government."<sup>101</sup>

Cam Mackie raised this issue with the Minister, admitting that:

"No comprehensive approach to developing alternate employment opportunities for members of these Bands was taken [by DIAND] from 1970 to 1975. Welfare payments were increased drastically following the fishing ban in 1970 and many problems resulted from these monies without addressing the problem of employment.

"In 1971, 1973, 1975, 1976, Briefs from these Bands were presented to both levels of government. These briefs were consistent in their requests for resources and expertise to assist them in planning and implementing Long Term Comprehensive Socio-Economic Development of their Reserves....

Inaction of both governments since 1970 has resulted in a deterioration of the social and economic fibre of these communities beyond what would have been the case if a suitable response was given in 1970, 1971, or 1973."<sup>102</sup>

---

<sup>101</sup> Memorandum from P. Jacobs, Kenora District Office to Cam Mackie, DIAND, in Ottawa, December 10, 1976.

<sup>102</sup> "Briefing Notes: Grassy Narrows and Whitedog", submitted to the Office of the Minister, December 1976.

Table III:5

TOTAL EXPENDITURES BY THE GOVERNMENT OF ONTARIO ON THE

GRASSY NARROWS RESERVE: 1972-1977

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Amount</u>
1972-1973	\$ 30,361
1973-1974	27,981
1974-1975	39,737
1975-1976	278,232
1976-1977	33,836
1977-1978	38,181
Total	<hr/> \$448,328

Expenditures by Category and Percent of Total

<u>Category</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Investment in Community Facilities:		
Day Care Centre	\$131,500	
Band Store	30,000	
	\$161,500	36%
Investment in Equipment:		
Skidders	65,260	
Sawmill engine	4,384	
Other	1,200	
	70,844	16%
Fish for Food Programme	87,325	20%
Employment/Job Creation:		
Fire fighting, tree planting, cone collec- tion, other projects	101,368	22%
Funding for mercury meetings	12,550	3%
Life-skills Programme	9,741	3%
Rotating Fund	5,000	
	<hr/> \$448,328	<hr/> 100%

---

Data Source: List of all projects funded by the Ontario government provided to the Grassy Narrows Band by the Indian Community Secretariat in Kenora.

Despite the "new awareness" on the part of senior DIAND officials of the need for comprehensive community planning, the machinery of government continued to churn out sporadic and short-term projects. Very few projects attempted to replace the loss of commercial fishing with activities that might reinforce traditional social relations. The Ontario government was reluctant to press the non-native holders of commercial fishing licences on Oak and Maynard Lakes (two non-polluted commercial fishing sites) to turn over their licences to the Grassy Narrows Band. The "Fish for Fertilizer" program, whereby Band members could fish the river, did not provide enough economic incentive to attract commercial fishermen. A proposal for a shoe factory never materialized; and, the emerging canoe factory failed after two seasons of operation. Repeated requests for comprehensive development planning, submitted formally to the Canada-Ontario Mercury Committee, continued to provoke hollow protestations of concurrence and government support.<sup>103</sup> Neither Government was willing to commit resources to the massive developmental effort required. Furthermore, the limited assistance that was forthcoming for remedial and short-term projects was always extended in the spirit of charity and "good will". Neither Government wished its actions to be interpreted as a disposition of legal, moral, or social obligations to redress injustice or to compensate for inflicted adversity. In the end, the Canada-Ontario Mercury Committee, despite its high-ranking representation, also failed to satisfy the promises of restitution and the expectations for socio-economic reconstruction that the politicians had kindled in early 1976.

---

103

On March 3, 1977, the Grassy Narrows Band submitted another lengthy and detailed brief to both Governments outlining precisely the steps that each Government could and should take to help the Band plan its long-term development. By then, I had already been recruited as the Band's adviser and community planner, so I had ample opportunity to observe the governments' reactions to Band proposals. The adviser for the Whitedog Band was Bruce Crofts, a Toronto insurance executive, who had become genuinely committed to finding a solution to the social disintegration that he observed at Whitedog. He was also appalled at the inability of governments (or their unwillingness) to commit the level of resources required. In a letter to Judd Buchanan, (December 1, 1975), he put it very well: "No white community would be permitted to destroy itself, as many [Indian] communities are doing, without massive government assistance and aid".

In April 1977, the Ontario Government by an Order-in-Council appointed Mr. Justice Patrick Hartt of the Ontario Supreme Court "to conduct an inquiry into major developments north of the 50th parallel of north latitude". The Royal Commission on the Northern Environment was born. For eight months, Justice Hartt toured northern Ontario and conducted hearings on a wide range of issues and concerns to "northerners". He heard native and non-native views on resource development and environmental assessment. On January 9, 1978, he came to Whitedog reserve to hear the statements of the Whitedog and Grassy Narrows Bands.<sup>104</sup> Chief Fobister told Justice Hartt that "our backs are against the wall". With the skill of a born orator, he read from the Band's submission:

"In Summation:

- The intentional undermining of our religion and our way of life from the Treaty to the present by the Roman Catholic church, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Government;
- the loss of income from diminished muskrat due to hydro flooding;
- the Jones Road breaking the isolation factor [the relocation] which helped the preservation of a way of life;
- the progressive alcohol addiction due to alcohol made readily available by tourist outfitters and taxi-drivers;
- the interdependency and introduction of a foreign value system;
- the loss of commercial fishing due to mercury;

---

104

Chief Simon Fobister welcomed the opportunity to appear before the Royal Commission because Justice Hartt was perceived as an independent and unbiased "man of law" who, if he could be made to understand the gravity of the situation on the reserve, could be of great assistance to the Band. It was interesting to me that Chief Fobister insisted on writing the Grassy Narrows Brief alone, without any outside editorial or substantive assistance. In past practice, governmental submissions had been drafted by Band advisers. Simon Fobister's speech to the Royal Commission was an eloquent and very moving testimonial which traced the Band's history since Treaty.

- the loss of employment and income when Barney Lamm's Ball Lake Lodge closed due to mercury;
- the easy availability of welfare discouraged men from working;
- the Chief and Council incapability to amend the mercury situation and to provide alternative employment,

caused the total physical, mental, and spiritual breakdown of our people. For seven long years we suffered. The average death rate per month was one, and other violent criminal acts were committed. Since 1970, we have had 10 Chiefs. In short, we hit rock bottom and our backs are against an unmoveable wall and now the only way out is to go forward."105

Justice Hartt was impressed with what he heard and with what he saw. In his report to the Ontario Cabinet, he stated plainly:

"Most shocking to me were the submissions that described the plight of the people on the Indian reserves of Whitedog and Grassy Narrows.... Their presentations gave me an unforgettable sense of their frustration with the inability of the Federal and Provincial Governments to work together to ease their desperate situation."106

In a direct reference to the Band's perception of the origins of the contemporary social upheaval, Justice Hartt wrote:

"I recognize that not all of the problems in Whitedog and Grassy Narrows are the result of mercury. They are affected by the many problems endemic to Indian communities, in part because of the impact of development. Mercury has, however, been the added factor which has pushed the situation into the intolerable.

---

105 Chief Simon Fobister, "Submission to the Royal commission on the Northern Environment", January 18, 1978.

106 The Royal Commission on the Northern Environment, Interim Report & Recommendations, April 4, 1978, p. 5.

I think the whole impasse reflects clearly the chasm of understanding between the predominant white perception and the Native perception of the problem. The Indian people cannot move, change their way of life, change their diet, live on welfare, lose their self-esteem and yet remain the same people....The Native people value their traditions. The land is not simply a place to live. It forms a symbiotic relationship with the people and the animals which cannot be wrenched apart without serious consequences...."107

The proceedings and recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Northern Environment are important because out of them emerged the last major political process that resurrected the hope of social justice and then, just a few years later, ground it into the dust. This "mediation process" constitutes the final phase in the bitter history of efforts to help a shattered society get on its feet. A word of introduction about how the process began is in order.

In his recommendations to the Ontario Cabinet, Justice Hartt included a proposal for tri-partite committee, with representatives of the federal and provincial governments and Indian people, which could settle outstanding grievances and facilitate decision-making by negotiation rather than by confrontation. In the case of Grassy Narrows and Whitedog, he was also convinced that litigation would not accomplish the professed objective of comprehensive socio-economic development; on this point, the Bands has also reached a similar conclusion.<sup>108</sup> In his report to the Government, Justice Hartt recommended:

---

107

Ibid., p. 24. Justice Hartt does not mention the issue of the closing of the river in his Interim Report, since neither the Whitedog nor the Grassy Narrows Band mentioned it in their submissions to the Royal Commission.

108

Although Justice Hartt acknowledged that questions of legal liability and compensation properly belonged to the courts, he had grave doubts that the kind of outcome usually produced by litigation (even if the court action were successful) would help the communities re-build. At the community level, similar observations were being voiced; the growing awareness that "litigation was not the way to go" was also influenced by the somewhat limited utility of what AMOG had produced. The litigation

"As its first priority, the Committee should address the plight of the Indian communities of Whitedog and Grassy Narrows. Methods to ensure access to resources and viable community economies, along with related supportive programs should be considered jointly by the Committee and the communities. To facilitate this, a mutually acceptable fact finder should be appointed to review and report on available information and options within 90 days."109

On April 10, 1978, Justice Hartt invited the two Chiefs, Roy McDonald and Simon Fobister, to Toronto. He promised to approach both governments on mediation and asked that the Bands appoint fact-finders and prepare a statement of the issues to be included in the mediation process. On May 9, the Chiefs returned to Toronto to meet with the Province of Ontario Steering Committee. There, to Minister Rene Brunelle and five Deputy Ministers, the Chiefs submitted a memorandum outlining their aspirations for a negotiated settlement. Over the summer of 1978, both

---

feasibility study had cost over \$156,000 (\$121,000 from the federal government and \$35,000 from PILJRA and other private sources). Since it was always considered "confidential", the federal government had no control over it; there were no accountability provisions; and, there was no evaluation of performance or results. The study, completed in April 1977, did not even produce a draft statement of claim.

In 1978, the study was reviewed by a group of private litigation lawyers. Bruce Crofts, in a letter to Arthur Kroeger, Deputy Minister of DIAND (October 2, 1978), writes: "The comments we received [on AMOG's work] ranged from a total incomprehension as to how funds of the magnitude expended could in fact have been spent with so little practical data to show for that effort. We were also advised that the statement of claim could have been filed, in the opinion of these other lawyers, at a mere fraction of the expense incurred by AMOG".

On March 22, 1978, the Chiefs and Band Councils of Whitedog and Grassy Narrows met and decided that their interests would be furthered by a negotiated out-of-court settlement with both REED Paper Ltd. and the two Governments. Still ongoing in 1978, however, was a socio-economic study on the effects of mercury. Funded by DIAND for a total of \$110,200 and directed by Peter Usher, this study attempted to prove that the social upheaval on both reserves was caused by the mercury pollution and the loss of commercial fishing.

109

Simon Fobister, notes from my diary, January 15, 1979.



Governments and the Bands engaged in lively discussions on the precise language of an agreement, on the selection of a Mediator, and on the budget for the mediation process.<sup>110</sup> Finally, on December 15, 1978, at Grassy Narrows, Hugh Faulkner, the Minister of DIAND representing the Government of Canada, Rene Brunelle, the Minister of Resources Development, representing the Government of Ontario, and Chiefs McDonald and Fobister representing the Whitedog and Grassy Narrows Bands, signed a formal mediation agreement. It was a day preceded by a long night of extraordinary anticipation and excitement; Simon Fobister talked until the early hours of the morning about his dreams and his hopes for his people. He said then that,

"For us, this mediation, it means everything. It means that we have a chance to re-affirm our basic treaty rights. It means that we can try to win back our rights to survival as a people. It means we can start to hope again."<sup>111</sup>

The mediation agreement defined the issues to be resolved among the parties as follows:

"The issues to be resolved...are related to adverse effects on their health and to the economic, social, cultural, and environmental well-being of the Bands of the said reserves directly or indirectly attributable, inter alia, to:

- (i) the artificial raising and lowering of water levels affecting the reserves;
- (ii) the flooding of reserve and non-reserve land;
- (iii) the relocation of the reserves and/or the residents thereof;

---

<sup>110</sup>

In October 1978, all parties to the mediation agreed that Edward B. Jolliffe, retired from the Staff Relations Board in Ottawa, would be Mediator. Bruce Crofts was selected as fact finder for the Whitedog Band; I became fact-finder for the Grassy Narrows Band.

<sup>111</sup>

Simon Fobister, notes from my diary, January 15, 1979.

(iv) the pollution of the environment affecting the reserves."<sup>112</sup>

In the first four months of 1979, intensive interviews with all the heads of the major family groups took place in the Grassy Narrows community. The purpose of the research was to document the issues in the mediation process and to arrive at an understanding of what the community desired as a "settlement".<sup>113</sup> Parallel with the research effort, a film was produced in order to capture the issues in the mediation and the proposals for settlement in a visual form. Under the direction of Hiro Miyamatsu, the film was composed of a series of interviews with Band members about their history and their aspirations for the future. It gave the people a voice, a chance to "speak out", to become aware and to actively participate in the mediation process. An enormous amount of work went into the preparation for the first meeting of all the parties. This historic meeting took place at Grassy Narrows on May 29, 1979.

At the first (and last) all-party mediation meeting, the Grassy Narrows Band outlined its requirements for settlement. To the Deputy Ministers of the Ontario Government and to the Assistant Deputy Ministers of the federal government, Chief Fobister said:

---

<sup>112</sup> "Memorandum of Understanding", December 15, 1978, between the Governments of Canada and Ontario and the Grassy Narrows and Islington (Whitedog) Bands. The issue of flooding is relevant only to the Whitedog Band; that reserve was relocated as a consequence of flooding by Ontario Hydro. The issue of raising and lowering of water levels is relevant to the effects on muskrats and wild rice caused by the actions of the Lake of the Woods Control Board.

<sup>113</sup> I interpreted the "fact finder" role to encompass not only the systematization of knowledge requisite to the mediation process but also the mobilization of people as active shapers of the research protocol. Interviews taped by a tape recorder showed people that their understanding of reality can be "trapped" in this form and then summarized and systematized; interviews on film performed the same function. In the end, the people could "see" the sum of individual contributions as the expression of the collectivity as a whole.

"My people understand the mediation process as the re-affirmation of treaty rights, defined not only as the rights to hunt, trap, and fish, but also as the basic human rights to survive and to compete with skills and education in the contemporary technologically advanced society...The issue is one of choice and the freedom to make the choice between two cultures, two lifestyles, and two paths for future development."<sup>114</sup>

The Band asked for "tools for development": education; a land and resource base; capital for economic projects and community infrastructure. Almost all Grassy Narrows people, when interviewed on the subject of mediation, had mentioned their concern over the lack of educational achievement; they said they wanted an Indian-run boarding school off the reserve in order to allow the children of the reserve to learn and study in a secure setting, separated from the alcoholism and the alcohol-related problems of reserve life. The second major request was for productive land: "the key to the restoration of viability to this community is land, not subsidy. Not a retreat, but a regrouping of traditional and new strengths."<sup>115</sup> The Band asked for the exclusive use of, and control over access to, land and resources that have traditionally been in general use by the Grassy Narrows people for trapping, hunting, fishing, and ricing. And finally, the Band asked for a Socio-Economic Development Fund. In principle, the endowment of this fund would be equal to the sum total of economic losses sustained by the community from mercury pollution.<sup>116</sup> Detailed planning for a new educational institution and for the Development Fund was to be achieved by two task forces of "experts" who would work closely with the community.

---

<sup>114</sup> Grassy Narrows Band, Presentation to the Governments of Canada and Ontario, Opening Session of the Mediation Process, May 29, 1979, p. 24.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, p. 32

<sup>116</sup> The endowment of the fund would be held in trust by an independent financial institution and invested; only the annual interest on the initial capital would be spent on economic development and social programs in accordance with Band priorities.

The government officials were impressed with the form and substance of the Band's presentation. In their replies, senior civil servants waxed eloquent on the subject of the Government's commitment to the mediation process. They gave their assurances that the holistic nature of the settlement proposals would be respected in all negotiations.

From that point on, the history of the mediation process is a sad and bitter tale. At the time of writing, September 1981, the Grassy Narrows Band is no closer to "just compensation" than it was at the beginning of this quasi-legal and highly publicized mediation process. Indeed, the people are no closer to "social justice" today than at the beginning of the decade of the 1970's. The mediation, technically still ongoing, must be considered to be an abject failure of nerve and political will. REED Paper Ltd., which had expressed an interest in being a party to the mediation, has withdrawn from the process entirely. The Mediator's personality, and his perception of his role, seemed to be out of touch with the realities of his assignment. The governments, in their turn, did not present any offer of settlement for the Mediator to work with. Over time, as new Ministers and Deputy Ministers and Assistant Deputy Ministers came on the scene, the mediation process was progressively robbed of priority status.<sup>117</sup> Today, there is no one responsible for the mediation process at the federal level who has the authority to negotiate. The entire set of Band proposals, moreover, has been reduced to a "market-basket" of innocuous things that the Department of Indian Affairs can do in the old way. Not only has nothing happened in the mediation process of any significance, but the public pressure on the politicians "to do something" for Grassy Narrows and Whitedog has also essentially disappeared.

---

117

Since the signing of the mediation agreement, there have been three Ministers of DIAND (Hugh Faulkner, Jake Epp, and John Munro); two Deputy Ministers (Arthur Kroeger and Paul Tellier); and four Assistant Deputy Ministers in the Indian Program (Cam Mackie, Huguette Labelle, David Nicholson, and Don Goodwin). The need to "re-educate" each new senior civil servant on the mediation process is evident. Over time, the responsibility for the mediation process has shifted downwards to lower and lower levels of authority and competence within DIAND.

Under such conditions, governments have no incentive to act; indeed, it is in their advantage to delay, to wait for the time when they can settle for the minimum.

In late March 1980, the people of Grassy Narrows did not re-elect Simon Fobister as Chief. Many blamed him for the failure of the mediation process. They felt betrayed again by the promises; once more they had been fooled by the rhetoric. The community slid into a deeper and darker depression under the intolerant and careless reign of the new Chief. The hopes for a "solution" that had risen and fallen with each new process, the aspirations that had failed to materialize, the fruitless rounds of talks, consultations, and submissions -- these have left a devastating legacy. Without doubt, the way in which the white society and its officialdom dealt with the mercury situation has left an imprint just as deep and as lasting as the poison in the river.

### CONCLUSION TO PART III

Mercury in the human body leaves its mark in the form of the degeneration of cerebellar cortices and the destruction of brain cells. The symptoms of its presence are felt in the numbness of extremities, tunnel vision, and loss of balance, but such indicators, which may not surface for many years, can also point to other diseases and disorders of the central nervous system. At Grassy Narrows, there are people who feel "a tingling sensation and numbness of feet and hands"; there are people with vision and hearing problems; and there are people with tremors and impaired balance. Yet, the conclusive link of such symptoms to mercury poisoning has eluded the medical establishment. The doctors admit that they do not know very much about the effect of low levels of exposure to mercury over a long period of time; they do not know how to relate sub-clinical effects, possibly cumulative ones, to mercury poisoning.

The Grassy Narrows people have their own interpretations of mercury. To some, "mercury is something the 'outsiders' made up" in order to legitimize the confiscation of their fishing rights and the right to live "in the Indian way". Others "just don't believe in mercury...people die from alcohol, not from mercury." Some admit that there might be mercury, but say that they are "not afraid of mercury. Mercury doesn't fight me. I can't see it; I can't taste it; I don't feel sick from it; and I don't know what mercury is." And others are afraid of the poison: "people have been trusting the fish for many years and suddenly you don't know whether to trust them any more....It's not so much a fear, it's a suspicion."<sup>118</sup>

What is so startling when people speak about mercury is that in spite of government's beating its breast about the "health education and

---

<sup>118</sup>

Steve Loon, March 12, 1979; Tom Payash March 14, 1979; George A. Keewatin, March 12, 1979; Charlie Fobister, March 9, 1979; and Andy Keewatin, January 4, 1979.

information program in the community", the vast majority of guides interviewed said that "no one ever explained what mercury meant to health".<sup>119</sup> Mercury thus presented a psychological problem, not only a medical one, because both the world of nature and the world of men could no longer be trusted.

In economic terms, the government ban on commercial fishing served to eliminate another sector of employment on the productive side of the economy. The immediate substitution of welfare exacerbated the stress of recent dislocation from the trapping way of life. Even the later initiation of "make-work" programs did not satisfy the human need for productive, meaningful work. The absence of work tied to traditional social relations created a depression which has outlasted the simple monetary losses produced by the closure of the commercial fishery. Yet these too were not insubstantial. They have been estimated to be close to a half a million dollars for the 1970-1990 period. The closure of Ball Lake Lodge meant much more to the people of Grassy Narrows than just the loss of guiding jobs; those who had guided there for almost a quarter of a century saw the end of an era.

The political response to the mercury issue was perhaps the most devastating impact of all. The problems of the community were magnified

---

119

"The doctors never told us anything, just not to eat fish. One day I got a letter that told me that my mercury count was 236 ppb. They took many samples of my blood and hair. I can read and write, but I don't understand what these letters say." George A. Keewatin, March 12, 1979.

"I have been on the Wabigoon all my life...I've been guiding for over twenty years...nobody told me about mercury either." Tom Payash, March 14, 1979.

"My mercury count was over 200 ppb. Nobody ever explained mercury to me." Emo Fontaine, March 29, 1979.

"One day I received a letter from Health and Welfare with some numbers on it; I was told I was at risk. I didn't understand the letter and nobody told me what the numbers mean. I guide every summer and eat fish." Alec Fobister, March 24, 1979.

by the constantly renewed expectations of a "solution" that failed to materialize and by the well-intentioned but fruitless attempts to intervene by way of short-term and remedial measures. The contributions of the larger society added to de-stabilization. The intrusion of scientists, medical personnel, sensation-seeking journalists, lawyers, and consultants added to the assault on a vulnerable people. The invisible barriers that protected the Indian people against unwanted visitors were breached with a vengeance, because as it turned out, the visitors came in order to satisfy their own curiosity, and then they moved on to more fashionable disasters. The media played a particularly pernicious role. One cannot read the accounts of mercury in northwestern Ontario without coming to the conclusion that this was a horror of epic proportions in which everybody had been stricken with the dread Minamata Disease. While the media successfully provoked the politicians into some semblance of sensitivity to the issue, the stories left psychological scars in the community. It must have been very difficult to face both the visible effects of the contamination and the invisible repercussions of a loss of faith in the motives of others and in the workings of nature.

Today, the numbness of spirit, the sense of cultural disorientation, the loss of security in the environment, the retreat into dependency, the feelings of powerlessness and apathy — these are the familiar symptoms of human trauma. We have no way of knowing how much of the trauma can be attributed to the poison in the river, and how much is due to the breakdown of a way of life and to all the other disruptions that have intruded into Ojibwa life over the course of this century. Yet no one can deny that the mercury contamination has contributed much to the pattern of cumulative injury.



## PART FOUR

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This work begins with a description of a human community that seemed bent on its own destruction. Like a Greek tragedy without the gods, this community seemed destined for great suffering, even catastrophe, because it was locked in by its past and by its present configuration of powerlessness, alienation, rage turned inward, and self-denial. In not caring for one another or for their offspring, in seeking an escape from reality in alcohol, in searching for redemption outside of themselves, the people of this community seemed doomed. They had trapped themselves in a vortex of forces whereby each generation reproduced its own pathology.

In Part I of this work, I attempt to define what I mean by breakdown in a social order and suggest some indicators by which the extent of breakdown can be measured. It seems to me that one of the characteristics of a healthy society is that aggressive impulses to kill, to humiliate, to do damage or inflict pain on others, particularly on members of one's own family, are controlled; in the absence of effective restraints and sanctions, the social group would disintegrate. "Pathological" or socially-destructive behaviour, then, is usually confined to a relatively narrow segment of the population, to the tail ends of a normal curve as it were. In a deteriorating society, however, the distribution is reversed. Internal mechanisms to control destructive impulses and to channel human energy into productive activity no longer function; social pathology becomes the collective norm.

The extent of breakdown in a social order can be measured by certain conventional indicators: the rate of violent death; the rate of suicide; the incidence of illness; the rate of crime; the incidence of child abuse; and, the fractures in family life. A community is in the process of social disintegration when the rates of these indicators begin to diverge sharply from "the norm" customary to that community in the past, and when such rates also go far beyond those prevailing in other communities of similar size and composition. In accordance with this

perspective, and based on the evidence reviewed in Part I and summarized below, I have concluded that Grassy Narrows is a community in the process of social breakdown.

Grassy Narrows is a settlement of about 500 Ojibwa Indians in northwestern Ontario. Up to the mid-1960's, nine out of every ten persons used to die from natural causes; in contrast, since the mid-1970's three out of every four persons have died from an act of violence. The probability that a human being will die from violence is much higher at Grassy Narrows than in any other Indian or non-Indian community in the region.

The rate of suicide and attempted suicide at Grassy Narrows in recent years is also extraordinary. Prior to 1970, no suicides were recorded in the community; since then, seven young persons have died by their own hand. In one year alone (1977-78), almost one-fifth of the entire population of children between the age of eleven and nineteen attempted suicide; this trend shows no signs of abating. Suicide as a cause of death per 100,000 population is about ten times greater at Grassy Narrows than the rate documented for the registered Indian population in Ontario.

Spree drinking is a serious problem. Survey data has shown that the majority of adults in the community are heavy drinkers. Most heavily dependent on alcohol are men and women in their child-bearing and child-rearing years. In the group of persons 30 to 44 years of age, for example, 80% can be classified as very heavy drinkers. Hospital records confirm that the days of hospitalization for alcoholism and for alcohol-related illnesses are far more numerous for Grassy Narrows than for other Indian communities in the region. The community's relatively higher rates of crime and public disorder are also directly related to the pervasiveness of spree drinking. Alcoholism, alcohol-related illness, and criminal and public order offences at Grassy Narrows are all phenomena characteristic of the decade of the 1970's.

Alcohol abuse by the adults has had a devastating impact on children. During an alcoholic "binge", parents stop nurturing their offspring. They deny them the basic requirements for physical existence: food, clothing, and security of shelter. Since such "binges" occur two or three times each month and may last several days or a week, children are subjected to a tormenting oscillation between solicitude and negation, care and denial. One repercussion of the derangement of family life and the dispossession of children during an alcoholic spree is that children cannot learn. In any given year, almost half of all children of school-age miss classes so frequently (because of hunger, lack of sleep, responsibility at home for younger siblings when parents are drinking) that they have to repeat their school year. The great majority of children drop out of school permanently at grade four or five. Their educational failure must not be viewed from the point of view of upward social mobility in the context of reserve life; what is important here is that the children of drinking families receive no encouragement to develop their human creative potential; they are caught between two worlds. They receive neither the formative moral precepts and basic skill training of the traditional Indian way of life nor the rudiments of the "three R's" requisite in the mainstream society. These children do not thrive; they are effectively trapped in a vicious circle of stunted growth and lack of opportunity for learning and discovery.

Pervasive child neglect is another phenomenon associated with the 1970's. Grassy Narrows has the highest number of children in the care of foster homes of any Indian community in the region. Three-quarters of all children are taken into care by the Children's Aid Society because they have been severely neglected, physically abused, or simply abandoned by their parents. Yet, the children in care represent but a small fraction of the total number of children in the community who are maltreated as a result of parents' excessive drinking. In response to their oppressive situation, the children of drinking parents form "gangs", sniff gas, or copy adult behaviour by drinking themselves into unconsciousness. Older children act out their powerlessness by destroying

property or by striking out against persons even more helpless than themselves. Some attempt suicide as a desperate act of protest. Those children who are not old enough to fend for themselves, who do not have older siblings to take care of them, or who are not lucky enough to be picked up by social workers sometimes die of neglect. Infant children are particularly vulnerable; many have been burnt, frozen, or smothered to death. The majority of parents at Grassy Narrows seem to have abdicated their responsibilities to their offspring. They even seem not to care about the conditions under which new life begins. Ultimately, they have written off the future generation of their own community.

In this small community, where almost everyone is related by blood or by marriage to everyone else, each act of violence has an aftermath. As one traumatic event follows another in rapid succession, the probability is low that in the aftermath of death in the family or some other painful occurrence, the people can return quickly to some semblance of a "normal everyday life". There is no "recovery time", no time for emotional wounds to heal. As the dark side of community begins to predominate, people feel they cannot cope and they continue drinking as before; thus, they do not utilize what resources there are in the community to help each other and help themselves. Life itself becomes one continuous aftermath of tragic events. Time and space become saturated with negation - with guilt, anger, alienation, and depression.

Like a deeply troubled person who creates and reinforces the very conditions that contribute to his illness, the community reinforces its pathology by legitimizing any action, including the most heinous act of social violence, committed under the influence of alcohol. Since no stigma, no sanction, no penalty accrues to the individual or individuals who cause harm to others under the presumed cover of the alcoholic spree, and since heavy drinkers are in the majority in the population, pathological behaviour becomes the norm. In metaphorical terms, the absence of controlling feedback response, in the form of internal sanctions against destructiveness, ensures that the social system, like a runaway equation,

will continue to be out of control. In the community of the old reserve, the controls were based on beliefs, values, and institutions. In the new reserve setting, the old control systems are useless in the face of fundamentally altered conditions. Not having any value, they become a source of shame rather than of pride and the search for alternatives is abandoned.

The anguish that I saw and experienced at Grassy Narrows compelled me to probe into the origins of what I believed was a profound disturbance in the collective psyche of a people. Rather than organizing my research around a "theory" of social disintegration, I wanted to let the theory emerge from observation. In this work, certain theoretical insights fall naturally between the segments of the story that unfolds in Parts II and III. The story is focused by two key events in the recent history of the community. These events, the relocation of the Grassy Narrows people to a new site in 1963 and the discovery of mercury contamination in the English-Wabigoon river in 1970, symbolize much more complex interactions between the community and external pressures and stimuli. The temporal relationship between these two events and the onset of the symptoms of breakdown in the social order is, of course, central to the analysis.

In Part II, the image of the community of the old reserve represents a baseline which enables a comparison to be made with contemporary conditions. People who live in a traumatic present tend to romanticize the past; therefore, it was essential to include the testimony of outside observers. These people confirmed what the Grassy Narrows people repeatedly emphasized, namely, that the old reserve was an altogether different and special place. There was still some stability and continuity with the traditional way of life; most importantly, the fundamental integration between beliefs, values, customs, and institutions had not yet been eroded under the corrosive impact of contact with the white society. At the same time, however, the geographic isolation of the old reserve community contributed to its vulnerability. Like an organism that has not been prepared to resist intrusion from a deadly virus, the community had few

natural defenses against the massive imposition of an alien form in all walks of life. The impact on a holistic society had to be holistic in its consequences. The sheer rate of change, moreover, added another dimension to the configuration of factors that triggered the pathologic process.

I recognize the difficulty in separating cause from effect; therefore, I am not attempting to argue that the combination of factors documented for the Grassy Narrows case will always produce mass psychosis; data to prove this thesis do not exist. It seems to me, however, that no people can be subjected to fundamental change, at a rate that goes far beyond that with which people can cope, in every single dimension, aspect, or correlate of their culture simultaneously without far-reaching and devastating consequences. In the case of indigeneous people, the situation is far more grave because not only is their way of life made dysfunctional under rapidly changing circumstances, but they have been told repeatedly that their culture is primitive, inferior, and even barbaric. The internalization of oppression in this form contributes greatly to collective trauma.

While the importance of the totality of the onslaught on the ways of knowing, imagining, and doing that a people learn to regard as natural cannot be over-emphasized, nevertheless for analytical purposes, the whole has to be divided into its parts. Thus, in Part II, in the essay on time and space, I discuss the consequences affecting individuals and the community when fundamental cultural orientations to time and space are suddenly transformed. I describe the disorientation that is produced when people find themselves in an environment where familiar psychological, even spiritual, cues that help them function in society are suddenly rendered useless, robbed of their basis and their meaning, and replaced with new ones that are strange and incomprehensible.

In the specific case of Grassy Narrows, I explain how the relocation of the Band from the old to the new reserve violated cardinal precepts of the Ojibwa culture with respect to the choice of a site for human

habitation and the order of people in space. The traditional criteria for settlement that had been worked out over centuries of occupation were based on both spiritual and practical considerations. In spiritual terms, the land had to be filled with "spirit-beings" or forms of consciousness that were helpful to man; these could be perceived only by the "inner" senses. Since not all points in space were equal, yet space was never empty, it was important to determine where the psychic, spiritual, and physical energies of man could be enhanced or amplified. In practical terms, the land had to be productive. It had to have fertile soil and be rich in game, fish, and other natural resources. The new site for Grassy Narrows was neither productive nor "spiritually fit" for human settlement, but the people's warnings to government officials went unheeded. The Band was relocated by the Department of Indian Affairs (DIAND) because the new site, which was situated near a logging road, made it easier for government officials to deliver the benefits of modern life: a new school, electricity, and medical care.

In the Ojibwa way of life, moreover, spatial order and social organization were intimately connected. On the old reserve, there was a wide margin of privacy and space separating the clan groups from each other. Clan territoriality was important to the identity of the group and its "place" in the social order. This was never understood by government officials; they determined the physical layout of houses on the new reserve according to the standards of the white society and the precedence given to the criterion of "efficiency" in housing provision. Not only did DIAND impose high-density housing in the manner of an urban lower-class subdivision, but government officials treated with contempt the request of families to live in close proximity to their kin. The customary clan-based residence pattern was disrupted with lightning speed by the random assignment of houses to individual households.

Traditional Ojibwa orientations to time were similarly disconnected from the cycle of natural phenomena by the imposition of a mode of production that sanctified time as a commodity that could be bought and



sold, saved or spent, made up or wasted. On the old reserve, the reference points for the perception of time were the seasons, to which were tied all the economic and social activities of the annual cycle. For the purposes of everyday life, the alternating periods of light and darkness caused by the movements of the sun were sufficient yardsticks for temporal orientation. The new reserve economy, in contrast, was structurally oriented around government-sponsored wage labour; this necessitated the adoption of Western time perspectives.

Other dimensions of the Ojibwa perception of time were rendered irrelevant in the new reserve context. In particular, the old people stopped teaching the young about the role of dreams and visions in guiding individual experience. The "ways of knowing" about the true nature of reality and one's identity by opening up the "inner" senses lost their basis under the new conditions of life. Such beliefs and values, if they no longer work to sustain human experience in an altogether different environment, are simply let go. The incentive to maintain myths and other cultural precepts is lost, if they no longer work to structure reality. If the process of loss is very rapid, and if new myths and customs are not created that better suit the changed reality, then people often experience acute disorientation. This is one of the familiar symptoms of psychic trauma.

In the essay on family life and social organization, I explore the theme of what happens in a social order when the basic unit of the family is suddenly bombarded with entirely new functional requirements for its organization and the distribution of rights and obligations among family members. I describe the breakdown of moral values, religious observance, and social customs that often accompany radical change in the structure of society and family life. In the specific case of Grassy Narrows, I show how the relocation wrenched the family out of the context of the trapping economy and thus altered its traditional role as the warp of the social fabric.

On the old reserve, the Grassy Narrows families lived on their traplines for the winter months. In this society, with very few public institutions and no formal associations, the family came to assume an importance unlike anything known in less isolated settings. The extended family was the largest unit of economic cooperation and social interaction. It had the responsibility of educating the young, sheltering the dependent, curing the ill, and transmitting the moral and spiritual values of the culture; it functioned as a "total institution" in the life of an individual. Every family member had responsibilities and obligations; rights and duties on the part of husband and wife were clearly defined and understood; old people and children had tasks appropriate to their age.

This distribution of rights and responsibilities among members of the extended family changed radically after the relocation. On the new reserve, trapping as an occupation for the whole family ceased when children had to attend the on-reserve school. The mutual obligations between husband and wife, on which the old order of respect was based, became irrelevant under conditions where the man "went to work" for wages and the woman stayed at home and "went shopping for groceries". Removed from the context where the man and the woman contributed equally and cooperatively to the family's welfare, both found it difficult to determine what their roles should be in the new setting. The extended family as a distinct functional and territorial unit, based on the winter trapping settlement and the summer family compound, collapsed. Under the centrifugal force of the new spatial order, the extended family disintegrated into randomly scattered individual "households". It was not long before the responsibilities that were once carried by the extended family were thrust upon an impersonal bureaucracy. Today, the obligation to provide for the physical welfare of family members, to cure the ill and shelter the dependent, is the domain of the Government.

More troubling, the changing in family life was not confined to the material side of existence. The change included the loss of symbolic rituals and forms of observance that elevated human existence from the

purely physical to the spiritual or metaphysical realm. On the old reserve, the ceremonies of naming a child and the rites of passage through puberty were more than simple enactments of ancient myths. Organized by the extended family, these were religious experiences based on the conviction that man had to seek his God in order to become a total personality. In the context of the pervasive materialism of the new reserve way of life, such beliefs, like those related to the existential reality of time and space, have provided no refuge from the anguish of the new world. The divorce from the natural rhythms of the land and the cycle of growth, decay, and regeneration has made it difficult to find meaningful connections between the visible and invisible universe. The community as a whole lapsed into a numbness of spirit from which it has not yet recovered.

In the chapter on community life and political organization, I examine the consequences on a social order when people are removed from one kind of social arrangement and community structure and placed into a new form of "community", whose boundaries, structure, and resources are defined by a different culture. I also attempt to trace the consequences that follow upon the imposition of a political order on this new "community" that is not based on either customary social relations or traditional ways of prescribing authority in the society. I show that under such conditions, indigeneous forms of social control are made dysfunctional; they are replaced by externally-imposed paternalistic controls administered by the bureaucracy of the dominant society.

The Grassy Narrows case illustrates these propositions well. The old reserve community derived from and depended upon a singular democracy of spirit. The clan-based family groups were not only largely independent in terms of subsistence; they were also mostly self-governing in terms of the conduct of relations among family groups and the enforcement of codes of behaviour by covert means. Community-wide social interaction took place at regular but infrequent intervals. The limited nature of interaction and the absence of voluntary associations and specialized societies, however, did not signify the absence of the spirit of

"communality". People recognized they belonged to a place called Grassy Narrows; they shared a common history; they lived by the same values, sentiments, and beliefs; and, they were related by inter-marriage and wider linkages of kinship. The community of the old reserve was a "niche" in the classic ecological sense. Yet, soon after the relocation, it became apparent that the ability of clan groups to relate to each other on the old reserve was not a skill that could be easily transferred to the new setting.

Part of the problem was, of course, caused by the change from a semi-nomadic existence to year-round residence in a specific village. The mixing of kinship groups and their compression in space beyond the limits that had been worked out through custom and usage added to the tensions of the new environment. The transformation in the conditions of space and in the seasonal cycle of movement, moreover, coincided with a sharp and permanent break in the traditions of communal authority. The Chief and Council of the old reserve never governed by rules and regulations or by an authority formally encased in a "machinery of government". The Chief had limited responsibilities and circumscribed authority: he had to ensure survival of those in need during times of scarcity or sickness; he had to protect treaty rights; he had to deal with the Indian Agent and distribute the tools (seeds, ammunition, nets) that were provided as part of the treaty agreement; he had to ensure that all families had equal access to natural resources; and, when so requested, he had to mediate in disputes that the families could not settle by themselves. The personal qualities which determined his recruitment as Chief, his moral stature, productive skills, and kinship relations, maintained his incumbency for there existed no prescribed rules by which he kept his position. Furthermore, he had no formal means to enforce his wishes unless the members of the Band Council, and all the heads of clans, acquiesced. He governed by consensus and not by law.

Government intervention in Indian community life all across the country altered, perhaps irrevocably, the roles and responsibilities,

tenure, qualifications, and the origin of authority of the Chief and Band Council. As the Department of Indian Affairs began pouring in money and services to bring the Indians "up to the standard of the modern society", government officials changed the institution of the Chief and Council to suit their own purposes. At Grassy Narrows and elsewhere, the role of the Chief began to be purely political in nature. Whether or not the Chief was a man who could set an example to others in traditional skills or moral virtues no longer mattered; what was important was whether or not he could speak English and relate to government bureaucrats on their own terms. As the Chief became the "dispenser" of the "benefits" of modern life, his source of authority began to rest exclusively in his relationship to Government. Furthermore, a bureaucracy had to develop at the Band level to administer government-provided housing, welfare, and wage jobs.

The change in the mode of livelihood on the old reserve of Grassy Narrows, based on the exploitation of natural resources, to the economy of the new reserve, based on the exploitation of government resources, produced other fundamental changes in community life. Families who, on the old reserve, were equal in status, rank, occupation, life style, and material wealth suddenly found themselves competing for the limited resources that the outside society had to offer. People became more selfish and self-centered as they attempted to manoeuver themselves into positions from which they could obtain economic advantage for members of their own kinship group. Indigeneous forms of self-help and mutual aid disappeared. Families "on the bottom" of the new social and economic order simply surrendered to the institutions that maintained their dependency and their poverty. The condition of inherent inequality and stratification that emerged at Grassy Narrows following the move to the new reserve is, of course, intimately bound up with the structural characteristics of economic life in our own society.

The importance that I attach to the economic factor in the analysis of social change is reflected in the care with which I document the nature of the transformation in the mode of livelihood of the Grassy Narrows people. In the context of my work as a whole, the material base of the culture receives relatively greater emphasis because man's physical survival depends upon the satisfaction of first-order needs. While the mode of production is an integral part of the wider system of conceptions and practices, however, other parts of the culture not directly related to economic production are also important. Even if everything related to nature and livelihood were put together in the center of things, and all other things were assembled around it, I believe that the totality of the Indian way of life would emerge as more comprehensive than the mode of production, yet obviously connected to it in fundamental ways. In other words, the material base is fundamental to life, but it is not necessarily more important than conceptions of the universe that enable man to go beyond the limitations of his physical existence and establish contact with everything that lives.

Having stated such a caveat, I would still venture to argue that certain changes in the mode of livelihood of a people are capable of accomplishing trauma without the addition of other intervening factors. Central, in my view, is the traumatic reaction produced when people suddenly find themselves in circumstances where they can no longer produce anything that is needed or sanctioned by the rest of the community or where their skills and training are rendered inappropriate to the conditions of work in a new environment. It can be assumed that every human being desires to derive meaningful satisfaction from the act of producing something that is needed. The need to create, to realize inherited potentialities of being, may be basic to human existence. Where the avenues towards fulfillment of creative and productive potential are blocked, people will feel a sense of impotence; they will withdraw into apathy and resignation. These forms of coping will become especially acute, and will appear as symptoms of trauma, among people who feel that

the world no longer operates by any logic that they can understand. It is my conviction that this has happened at Grassy Narrows.

On the new reserve, the Grassy Narrows people have been transformed from producers of commodities for exchange and domestic use to passive consumers of goods and services provided by the outside society. This transformation has taken place primarily as a function of government policy, but the impact of mercury contamination has been to accelerate this process. In one generation, the Grassy Narrows people have moved from relative self-sufficiency in providing for their own basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter to a position of almost complete dependency on government for housing and income to purchase food and services from outside suppliers. In the contemporary economy, for example, 82% of all household income comes from government. Trapping, the key sector in the old reserve economy and the core of the culture, now constitutes only 3.5% of total income in the community. Only 2.6% of the million or so dollars that flow into Grassy Narrows as income to households is spent within the reserve; the rest flows out again as payment for goods and services consumed by Indian people. Though "make-work" government projects may be better than welfare, many Grassy Narrows people realize that these activities are essentially without purpose and meaning. They bring money and money buys goods, but this process leaves them dissatisfied as producers. When people are not sustained by the confidence that they are producing something of value to the rest of the community, they become in their own eyes less worthy as men. Even those who are "employed" in band work projects on the reserve know that ultimately, their work does not make any difference in the community. A skating rink that is built soon gets destroyed; a house repaired is a house that will again be vandalized; the work is repetitive and meaningless in the context of the new reserve way of life.

Furthermore, the organization of work on the new reserve makes a mockery of certain traditional Ojibwa values. On the old reserve, success was related to effort; social status was related to the skills of a man

as a provider, hunter, and trapper. On the new reserve, whether one is working or idle, whether one has a job in a government-sponsored project or is on welfare, bears little relationship to one's skills or virtues as a human being. "Getting a job" on the new reserve is a function of political influence within the community and ultimately of the generosity of Government in any particular year. The assignment of social and economic status is thus determined by the circumstance of the moment rather than by the enduring standards of the Ojibwa culture. Success and failure under these conditions are also largely fortuitous. Government bureaucrats are unpredictable; the jobs for Indian people are controlled by distant persons shuffling papers across their desks. The universe is not controlled by a logic that the people can comprehend or ascertain intuitively but rather by forces which are haphazard and capricious. The Grassy Narrows people feel helpless when they cannot control the conditions of their work; they believe they are helpless and without their own resources. In their passivity and resignation, they shift the blame for all their misfortune to the Government which "owes" them a good living. I believe that this externalization of responsibility for one's present conditions adds another factor to the vicious cycle of socially destructive behaviour.

Although more can be said about the nature of the change in the mode of livelihood of the Grassy Narrows people in the last twenty years, I will limit myself to three concluding observations. First, it is true that the new economic order brought the people of Grassy Narrows an unprecedented level of material prosperity. This is documented in the statistics on the level of household income on the new reserve; it is also reflected in the common refrain by Indian people that "life on the new reserve is much easier than it was before". At the same time, an enormous proportion of income is spent on the purchase of liquor and on alcohol-related expenditures; the society as a whole is self-destructive. The people admit that they are alienated from each other, that they feel insecure, and that "the new reserve is a much poorer place in spirit than the old reserve ever was". There is no need to expound on this apparent



contradiction; material prosperity and communal well-being do not necessarily co-exist.

Second, the people themselves recognize the price they have paid for some of the benefits of modernization: concentration of power in the hands of a few and ever-widening inequalities of opportunity in the society; a change in cultural values away from mutual aid and self-help and towards the privatization of all goods and services; a radical and negative shift in traditional patterns of food preparation and nutrition; and, a devastating transformation in the role of women in the society. Further, as people become used to, and dependent upon, high levels of cash income, it is hard for them to envisage what life would be like without government subsidies, irrespective of the social costs associated with this mode of existence. The increasing materialism of their way of life makes it more and more difficult to remember, let alone realize, aspirations for the life of the spirit that were embedded in their traditional culture and considered indispensable for the formation of Indian identity.

Third, the increase in material prosperity is not a consequence of the participation of the Indian people on the productive side of an expanding economy. What the process of "modernization" has done is to push Indians further away from participation in the productive activities of the nation than they have ever been, to separate them from the means of production embodied essentially in land and resources, and to turn them into men and women who have neither land, nor capital, nor even a secure place among Canadians who sell only their labour. The ultimate hallmark of this process is not development but stagnation and marginality.

The overwhelming question is, of course, how this happened given that government policy was presumably oriented towards "economic and social development" since the early 1960's. The stated objective of Indian policy was to lead the Indian people towards "the full, free, and non-discriminatory participation in Canadian society". I suggest that the case study of the relocation of Grassy Narrows illustrates very well not

the presumed intent of public policy but the consequences of policy. A measure of the variance between intent and outcome may predispose some observers to speculate on Government's "hidden agenda" in its relationship to Indian people and to pose the question of deliberate genocide. I do not address this point; I take the position that the officials of the Department of Indian Affairs, who imposed upon the people of Grassy Narrows a way of life incompatible with their culture, were operating under the best of intentions. Perhaps their flaw was not malice but ignorance. It is significant, however, that they acted in a manner consistent with the philosophy of development, ethic of community planning, and standard operating procedures current within the Department at the time of the relocation of Grassy Narrows.

If an abstract of the "philosophy of development" applied in the case of the relocation of Grassy Narrows were to be made, it would contain the following elements: first, the "Indian problem" is a problem of "poverty". Poverty is equated with the obvious conditions on the vast majority of Indian reserves, namely, unemployment, large families, poor health, substandard housing, low levels of education, and an attitude of despair and defeat. Second, the problem of poverty can be solved by government programming for "development". The objective of such "development" is to accelerate the movement of Indian people along the path from a traditional, backward society to a modern and dynamic one; movement along this path is considered to be inevitable. Third, the appropriate government strategy is to provide physical improvements and social services to Indians on the basis of the principle of equality with all other Canadians. It is at this point that the concept of "development" becomes equated with "modernization". The maximization of the greatest number of goods and services produced by the Department (jobs, houses, schools, social services) for the greatest number of people becomes the unstated goal of government policy. Fourth, one of the main barriers along the path to modernization is the attitude of Indian people to change. Since Indians often do not know what is best for them, it is incumbent upon government to make them understand the nature of progress.

Part of government's role and responsibility is to convince Indian people that economic progress is made when nature is transformed into resources, while social progress is made when "the primitive" are drawn into civilization.

In the specific case of Grassy Narrows, I provided documentation to show that these principles constituted the ideological framework wherein the decision to relocate the community was made. Indeed, many Indian communities were relocated at about the same time in order to make it easier for government officials to fulfill their mandate of modernization. Given the overriding emphasis on physical improvements (housing, roads, infrastructure), it is not surprising that the ethic of community planning was almost exclusively oriented towards concepts of economy and efficiency; at that time, most community planners in district offices of DIAND were usually construction supervisors. Under the prevailing mode of Indian-government relations, moreover, it was not mandatory for government officials to "consult" with the community. Thus, the Indian Agent in the Kenora office was able to ignore the voices of concern with respect to the relocation proposal; further, he was able to run roughshod over the voices of protest from Band members with respect to the layout of houses in the new community. In fact, relocation was not considered important enough to warrant documentation. Government officials did what they pleased at Grassy Narrows because the Department of Indian Affairs exercised a "radical monopoly" over the lives of Indians.

I would contend that DIAND continues to exercise this "radical monopoly" today. The authority, responsibility, and resources for administering and controlling every aspect of Indian life still rest primarily with the Department. Although there are a few encouraging signs of change in public pronouncements of DIAND policy, the way in which resource development activities (connected with the search for oil and gas) are being conducted in the north betray only a token recognition of the communities' right to determine both the nature of development and the

pace at which it proceeds. There is very little evidence that DIAND officials understand the relationship between the rate of social change possible for an indigenous people and the rate of economic change that affects them. The rate of economic change is still allowed to be the dominant factor and native communities are left to adjust as best as they can. This idea of the "rate of change" leads me to a summary of the third major part of my thesis, namely, the assessment of the impact of the environmental disaster of mercury contamination on the social order of Grassy Narrows.

I begin the analysis of the impact of mercury poisoning on the community with the proposition that an environmental disaster cannot be properly assessed in isolation from an understanding of the vulnerability of the people who are exposed to it. I suggest that a community that has just experienced a traumatic event a few years before will suffer much more acutely the effects of yet another crisis. In such a situation, the environmental contamination has both substantive impacts, which interact in a complex manner with previous impacts, and an accelerating impact on already established disintegrative processes in community life.

The pollution of the English-Wabigoon river by methyl mercury introduced a new element to the configuration of causal factors that may help explain the origins of breakdown in community life at Grassy Narrows. In the first place, it introduced an organic poison into the human body that was not there previously. Although it is true that doctors have not yet diagnosed a single case of the dread Minamata Disease in either Whitedog or Grassy Narrows, I am convinced that it is too early to conclude that the risk has passed. The medical establishment knows very little about the long-term effects of small doses of mercury ingested on a seasonal basis over a long period of time. The pattern of exposure of Indian people, moreover, is so different from that documented for Iraq and Japan that perhaps there is reason to doubt whether the etiology of illness applicable to these international contexts can be translated to the Grassy Narrows situation without modification. While there has been

no medical tragedy in Canada comparable to that in Japan or Iraq, there may be subtle neurological and behavioural changes among Indian people, attributable to mercury, which are simply not detectable at the present time. Such changes may have a bearing on the health of individuals and the well-being of community.

In the second place, the possibility that there could be an interactive effect between the poison of mercury and the poison of alcohol is a troubling one. Both substances affect the central nervous system by destroying brain cells; both damage other vital organs of the body, like the liver; both impact perfidiously on the human fetus. The symptoms of Minamata Disease and alcoholism are practically identical. Yet, we know very little about the cumulative, and possibly interactive, effect of the two toxins on the human body. Therefore, we cannot state with certainty that mercury bears no relationship to the observed indications of psychic and behavioural disorder at Grassy Narrows.

The contamination of the river had significant and adverse impacts on the community economy when commercial fishing ceased and when people were displaced from guiding by the closure of Ball Lake Lodge. The estimated economic losses resulting from the closure of the fishery are substantial if calculated over the number of years that the fish will remain poisoned. These consequences of contamination, by themselves, would not have produced trauma nearly as deep had they not followed in rapid succession other events and processes that had already undermined the mode of livelihood and the social order of the Indian community. In this respect, the contamination accelerated the already intolerable rate of change in the foundations of Ojibwa existence. This acceleration took place in four key areas.

First, the cessation of commercial fishing contributed further to the assault on the Indian family as a productive unit. It removed one more economic option that allowed family members to work together cooperatively. This followed the punishing blow to the organization of

work around the extended family delivered by the relocation, the education of children in an on-reserve school, and the end of trapping as a way of life.

Second, the cessation of commercial fishing removed one more resource that allowed Indian people to be relatively self-sufficient in providing for their material needs. The process of removing Indians from the means of production, embodied essentially in land and its resources, had begun much earlier in the period after the Second World War and was related to the increasing intervention by the Ontario government in regulating resource access and use. This process received even greater impetus as a result of the federal government's policy to encourage permanent, year-round settlements and a sedentary lifestyle organized around transfer payments and government-sponsored employment and training programs.

Third, the loss of the opportunity to take fish from the river for food reinforced and consolidated the people's dependency on external sources for the satisfaction of first-order needs. This was another factor in the process of transition from subsistence production to consumption that had started with the loss of family gardens on the new reserve and the shift to a mode of livelihood based on the exploitation of government cash subsidies.

Fourth, and related to all of the above, the mercury contamination accelerated the intrusion of Government in community life. Furthermore, this intrusion was not a positive one. The federal government reacted to the disruption of employment in guiding and fishing by massively increasing welfare payments. This initial and inappropriate response served to compound the adverse economic effects of mercury contamination. It added to the deteriorating morale in the community and it accentuated the sense of helplessness on the part of Indian people in the face of conditions over which they had no control. Thus, the phrase that the people use to describe the impact of mercury on their way of life is a powerful one; they call mercury, "the last nail in the coffin".

The story of mercury does not end with a summation of technical, medical, and economic impacts. Perhaps the most virulent mark by mercury on the tissues of community has not been left by the organic poison, but by the poison of mistrust, empty rhetoric, crushed aspirations, and bad faith left by the white society in its dealings with Indian people over the mercury issue. For years, the community of Grassy Narrows was flooded with journalists, scientists, consultants, politicians, bureaucrats, and lawyers - each promising aid and assistance in fighting for "social justice". As it became apparent that there would be no human tragedy of Minamata proportions at Grassy Narrows, the interest of the white society subsided and all the promises of aid came to naught. I suggest that the way in which governments dealt with the issue, and the way in which the issue was defined, managed, and politicized by the white society, has left an imprint on the community every bit as destructive as methyl mercury itself.

The process by which such an impact contributes to breakdown in the social order is a subtle one and difficult to document. It seems to me, however, that the people of Grassy Narrows, so recently wrenched from their cultural moorings, would be particularly vulnerable to the loss of a sense of security in nature and the loss of faith in the integrity of other men. Patronized as objects of charity and government handout, lacking self-confidence that their culture has any value, such a people would be driven to passivity, to a profound sense of their own impotence, to a kind of capitulation to the forces beyond their control. One set of responses to such a state is to externalize the cause of one's misfortune and to place all the blame and the guilt on someone else. In this situation, a person becomes completely passive and abdicates all responsibility for his conditions. I suggest that passivity is a state of nothingness and that a human being cannot tolerate such a state for a prolonged period. One way of dealing with such intolerable stress is to tear oneself apart or to hurt others. When such a process begins to operate at a subconscious level within many individuals in any collectivity, the manifest symptom is a community that seems bent on its own self-destruction.

There are three conditions that reinforce this process. One is internal to the community and relates to the lack of penalties or sanctions for destructive behaviour and the existence of a code that "under alcohol, everything is forgiven". The second and third are external to the community. The "environment" created by government policy reinforces a certain mode of behaviour. Today, if parents abandon their infants in an unheated house in mid-winter, they know a social worker will eventually come and find the children and take them away. If a teenage gang burns a house down, the government will provide another; if someone is hurt or killed by such an action, the penalty of probation, or even training school, is meaningless. Thus, there is no negative feedback, internal or external, to the mode of destructive behaviour. The third reinforcing condition is that white society, particularly in the town of Kenora, has an image of the Indian as a coarse and profane person who has a contaminating influence in any environment that he touches. This image becomes internalized and people begin to behave in a manner consistent with how others expect them to behave. These conditions are so reinforcing to individual acts of aberrant behaviour that the original "causes" of breakdown within the middle generation of Grassy Narrows no longer need to be operative in order to produce pathological behaviour. Indeed, among the young generation today, I believe that such "systemic" influences provide a rationality for social disorder that no longer rests on causal factors of historical importance. The modern world breeds its own forms of discontent.

I have come full circle in this work and now I wish to conclude with a statement of personal conviction. I believe that no one is beyond redemption and that no collectivity of people is condemned. A precondition of social reconstruction in the community of Grassy Narrows, however, is a shared consciousness, on the part of a critical mass of people, that the road to the future is the road that the people will make themselves. To accept with resignation and apathy that their present condition is their "destiny", to believe that they do not have the power to influence any of their conditions, to continue to blame others for



their present situation, to stop fighting for their children's future, and to seek salvation outside of themselves, will surely guarantee that nothing will ever change in their society. In the broadest philosophical sense, and in full cognizance of their historical sorrow, they have to take responsibility for their own lives; they have to come to understand that a slave is a man who waits for someone else to come and free him.

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Armstrong, F.A.J. et al. "Mercury in Sediments and Waters of Clay Lake, Northwestern Ontario", in J.F. Uthe (ed.) Mercury in the Aquatic Environment. Winnipeg: Fisheries Research Board of Canada, Manuscript Report Series no. 1167, 1972.
- Azzaria, L.M. and Habashi, F. "Mercury Pollution - An Examination of Some Basic Issues". CIM Bulletin, August, 1976.
- Barton, Allen H. Communities in Disaster. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1969.
- Bateson, Gregory. Steps to an Ecology of Mind. New York: Chandler Publishing Company, 1972.
- Berger, Thomas R. Northern Frontier Northern Homeland, The Report of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry: Volume One. Ottawa: Printing Office, Department of Supply and Services, 1977.
- Berger, Peter L. and Luckmann, T. The Social Construction of Reality. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1967.
- Bishop, Charles A. The Northern Ojibwa and the Fur Trade. Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada Limited, 1974.
- Bishop, J.N. and Neary, B.P. Mercury Levels in Fish from Northwestern Ontario 1970-1975. Toronto: Ontario Ministry of the Environment, 1976.
- Bligh, E.G. Mercury and the Contamination of Freshwater Fish. Winnipeg: Fisheries Research Board of Canada, Manuscript Series No. 1088, 1970.
- Braroe, Niels Winther. Indian & White. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975.
- Brody, Hugh. "An Overview". A Paper Submitted to the Berger Inquiry Hearings on the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline. April 1976. (Mimeographed.)

Campbell, Maria. Halfbreed. Toronto: McClelland and Steward Limited, 1973.

Chardin, Teilhard De. Let Me Explain. New York: Harper & Row, Inc., 1970.

Clairmont, Donald H. and Magill, Dennis W. Africville. The Life and Death of a Canadian Black Community. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974.

Clarkson, T.W. "Exposure to Methyl Mercury in Grassy Narrows and Whitedog Reserves." Report prepared for the Medical Services Branch, Health and Welfare Canada, 1976. (Mimeographed.)

Coles, Robert. Eskimos, Chicanos, Indians. Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1977.

Cumming, Peter A. and Mickenberg, Neil H. (eds.) Native Rights in Canada, Toronto: General Publishing Co. Ltd., 1972.

Diamond, Stanley. In Search of the Primitive. New York: Transaction Books, 1974.

Dozier, E.P. "Problem Drinking Among American Indians: The Role of Socio-Cultural Deprivation," Quarterly Journal of Studies of Alcohol. 27 (1966): 72-87.

Driben, Paul and Trudeau, Robert S. "The Fort Hope Experience: The Devastating Impact of Government Intervention in the Affairs of an Indian Band." Thunder Bay, Ontario, 1979. (Mimeographed.)

Dunning, R.W. Social and Economic Change among the Northern Ojibwa. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Some Problems of Reserve Indian Communities: A Case Study." Anthropologica 6 (1974): 5-37.

Durkheim, Emile. Suicide. Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1951.

Erikson, Erik H. Childhood and Society. New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 2nd edition, 1963.

Erikson, Kai T. Everything in Its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976.

Farkas, Carol. "Components of the Northern Canadian Indian Diet and Mercury Toxicity". Paper prepared for the Mercury Project, National Indian Brotherhood, Ottawa, June 1976. (Xerox.)

Felske, Brian. "Certain Aspects of the Commercial Fishery at White Dog and Grassy Narrows". Paper prepared for the Anti-Mercury Ojibway Group, January, 1978. (Xerox.)

Freire, Paulo. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. New York: The Seabury Press, 1973.

Frideres, J.S. Canada's Indians. Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice-Hall of Canada Ltd., 1974.

Geographic Board, Canada. Handbook of Indians of Canada. Ottawa: King's Printer, 1913.

Giesbrecht, N. and Brown J. Alcohol Problems in Northwestern Ontario - Preliminary Report. Toronto: The Addiction Research Foundation, 1977.

Goffman, Erving. Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959.

Government of Canada. Department of the Environment. "National Inventory of Sources and Emissions of Mercury (1970)." Internal Report APCD 73-6, 1973. (Mimeographed.)

\_\_\_\_\_. Department of Indian Affairs (DIAND). Annual Report, 1885. Ottawa: Government of Canada Printing Office, 1885.

\_\_\_\_\_. The Historical Development of the Indian Act. Treaties and Historical Research Center, DIAND. August, 1978.

\_\_\_\_\_. Department of National Health and Welfare. "Task Force on Organic Mercury in the Environment: Final Report", 1973. (Mimeographed.)

\_\_\_\_\_. Department of National Health and Welfare. Methyl-mercury in Canada. Ottawa: Government Printing Office, 1979.

\_\_\_\_\_. Journal of the Senate and the House of Commons, CVII, 1961.

\_\_\_\_\_. Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy. Ottawa: Government Printing Office, 1969.

Government of Ontario. Department of Lands and Forests. "The Round Lake Ojibwa, The People, The Land, The Resources 1968-1970." Toronto, December 1971. (Mimeographed.)

\_\_\_\_\_. Interdepartmental Task Force on Mercury. "Fourth Report of the Mercury Task Force." Toronto, 1973. (Mimeographed.)

\_\_\_\_\_. Royal Commission on the Northern Environment. Interim Report & Recommendations. Toronto: Queen's Park, April 4, 1978.

Greenwood, Martin H. Big Trout Lake: A Pilot Study of a Northern Indian Settlement in Relation to its Resource Base. Ottawa: Department of Citizenship and Immigration, 1964.

Hall, Edward T. The Silent Language. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959.

\_\_\_\_\_. The Hidden Dimension. New York: Anchor Books, 1969.

\_\_\_\_\_. Beyond Culture. New York: Anchor Books, 1977.

Hallowell, A. Irving. Culture and Experience. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1955.

Hamilton, A.L. "A Survey of Mercury Levels in the Biota of a Mercury Contaminated River System in Northwestern Ontario." Report No. 1167, The Freshwater Institute, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1972. (Mimeographed.)

Handlin, Oscar. The Uprooted. Toronto: Little Brown and Co. (Canada) Ltd., 1973.

Harada, Masazumi. "Epidemiological and Clinical Study of Mercury Pollution on Indian Reservations in Northwestern Ontario, Canada", 1976. (Mimeographed.)

Hartung, R. and Dinman, B.D. eds. Environmental Mercury Contamination. Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ann Arbor Science Publishers, 1972.

Hawthorn, H.B. "Administration and Primitive Economy," The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science 15(1949): 87-96.

Hawthorn, Harry B.; Belshaw, Cyril S.; Jamison, Stuart M. The Indians of British Columbia: A Study of Contemporary Social Adjustment. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958.

Hawthorn, Harry B. et al. A Survey of the Contemporary Indians of Canada. Volume I. Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1967.

Henry, Jules. Pathways to Madness. New York: Vintage Books, 1973.

Hickerson, Harold. The Chippewa and Their Neighbours: A Case Study in Ethnohistory. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970.

Honigmann, John J. "Social Disintegration in Five Northern Canadian Communities," The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology, vol. 2, no. 4 (November 1965): 199-214.

Hunter, D. and Russell, D. "Focal Cerebral and Cerebellar Atrophy in a Human Subject due to Organic Mercury Compounds," Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery and Psychiatry, 17 (1954): 235-241.

Hutchison, G. and Wallace, D. Grassy Narrows. Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold Ltd., 1977.

Illich, Ivan. Retooling Society. Cuernavaca, Mexico: CIDOC-Cuaderno No. 80, 1972. (Mimeographed.)

- Iverson, Noel and Matthews, D. Ralph. Communities in Decline: An Examination of Household Resettlement in Newfoundland. Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University, St. John's, Newfoundland, 1968. (Mimeographed.)
- Jacobson, Eleanor M. Bended Elbow. Kenora: Central Publications, 1976.
- Jenness, Diamond. The Ojibwa Indians of Parry Island, Their Social and Religious Life. Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, Bulletin No. 78, 1935.
- Jorgensen, Joseph G. The Sun Dance Religion. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972.
- Kenora Social Planning Council. While People Sleep, Sudden Deaths in the Kenora Area. Kenora: Grand Council Treaty No. 3, 1973.
- Klausner, S.Z.; Foulks, E.F.; Moore, M.H. The Inupiat, Economics and Alcohol on the Alaskan North Slope. Philadelphia: Center for Research on the Acts of Man, 1979.
- Landes, Ruth. Ojibwa Sociology. New York: Columbia University Contributions to Anthropology, XXIX, 1937.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Ojibwa Woman. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1971.
- Leacock, Eleanor Burke and Lurie, Nancy Oestreich (eds.). North American Indians in Historical Perspective. New York: Random House, 1971.
- Leighton, Alexander. My Name is Legion. New York: Basic Books, 1959.
- Lifton, Robert Jay. Death in Life; Survivors of Hiroshima, New York: Random House, 1968.
- Lithman, Yngve Georg. The Community Apart. Stockholm: University of Stockholm, 1978.

- Lund, Duane R. Lake of the Woods Yesterday and Today. Staples, Minnesota: Nordell Graphic Communications, 1977.
- Lundstedt, Sven. "An Introduction to Some Evolving Problems in Cross-Cultural Research." (Section on "Personality Determinants and Assessment"). Journal of Social Issues, 19 (July 1963): 1-9.
- Lurie, Nancy Oestreich. "The World's Oldest On-Going Protest Demonstration: North American Indian Drinking Patterns," Pacific Historical Review, XL, 3 (August 1971): 311-332.
- MacInnis, T.R.L. "History of Indian Administration in Canada." Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science. 12, 3: 387-394.
- McLuhan, T.C. Touch the Earth. New York: Outerbridge & Lazard, 1971.
- Marx, Karl. Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy. Ed. by T.B. Bottomore and M. Rubel. New York: Penguin Books, 1964.
- Mead, Margaret. The Changing Culture of An Indian Tribe. New York: Capricorn Books, 1966.
- Merton, Thomas. Seeds of Contemplation. Wheathampstead, Hertfordshire: Anthony Clarke Books, 1972.
- Mills, C. Wright. The Sociological Imagination. New York: Oxford University Press, 1959.
- Morris, Alexander. The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba and the Northwest Territories. Toronto: Belfords, Clarke, 1880.
- National Indian Socio-Economic Development Committee (NISED). To have what is one's own ("The Beaver Report"). Ottawa: NISED, 1979.
- Ontario Public Interest Research Group (OPIRG). "Quicksilver and Slow Death". A publication prepared and distributed by OPIRG, Inc., Waterloo Ontario, 1976.



- Polanyi, K. The Great Transformation. Boston: Beacon Hills Press, 1957.
- Ponting, J. Rick and Gibbins, Roger. Out of Irrrelevance. Toronto: Butterworths and Company, 1980.
- Radin, Paul. The World of Primitive Man. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1971.
- Ray, Arthur J. Indians in the Fur Trade: Their Role as Trappers, Hunters, and Middlemen in the Lands Southwest of Hudson Bay, 1660-1870. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974.
- Redfield, Robert. The Little Community. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960.
- Richardson, B. Strangers Devour the Land. Toronto: MacMillan Company of Canada Limited, 1975.
- Robinson, Ira M. New Industrial Towns on Canada's Resource Frontier. Chicago: University of Chicago Department of Geography Research Paper, No. 73, 1962.
- Rogers, Edward S. "Changing Settlement Patterns of the Cree-Ojibwa of Northern Ontario." South-Western Journal of Anthropology 19(1963): 64-88.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Round Lake Ojibwa. Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 1962.
- Sallot, Lynne and Peltier, Tom. Bearwalk. Don Mills, Ontario: Musson Book Company, 1977.
- Schaefer, Otto. "Changing Dietary Patterns in the Canadian North: Health, Social and Economic Consequences." Journal of the Canadian Dietetic Association, January 1977.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Health in Our Time?" The Canadian Nurse, October 1978.

Shepard, David. "Methyl Mercury Poisoning in Canada", Canadian Medical Association Journal, 114 (March 1976): 463-472.

Shkilnyk, Anastasia M. "The Ontario Region Data Book." Toronto, July 1977. (Mimeographed.)

Sieber, Rev. S.A. The Saulteaux Indians. St. Boniface, Manitoba: The Provincial House, 1948.

Simpson, Donald G. "Prepared Evidence before the National Energy Board in the Matter of Phase 3: Socio-Economic, Environmental and other Public Interest Matters." Hearings on the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline. Committee for Justice and Liberty Foundation, Toronto, 1979. (Mimeographed.)

Smith, Eugene and Smith, Aileen. Minamata. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975.

Spence, J.A. "Inorganic Mercury Discharges and Emissions by the Dryden Chemical Co. Ltd., March 1972 to October 1975." April, 1977. (Mimeographed.)

Stymeist, David H. Ethnics and Indians. Toronto: Peter Martin Associates Limited, 1975.

Toffer, Alvin. Future Shock. New York: Random House Inc., 1970.

Troyer, Warner. No Safe Place. Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company Limited, 1977. ✓

Turnbull, Colin M. The Mountain People. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972.

Usher, Peter; Anderson, P.; Brody, H.; Keck, J; and Torrie, J. "The Economic and Social Impact of Mercury Pollution on the Whitedog and Grassy Narrows Indian Reserves, Ontario." P.J. Usher Consulting Services, Ottawa, July 1979. (Xerox).

Vecsey, C. "Traditional Ojibwa Religion and Its Historical Changes."  
Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1977.

Vermeer, K.; Armstrong, F.A.J.; and Hatch, D. "Mercury in Aquatic Birds  
at Clay Lake, Western Ontario", Journal of Wildlife Management 37  
(1973): 58-61.

Watkins, Mel, ed. Dene nation - the colony within. Toronto: University  
of Toronto Press, 1977.

Weaver, Sally. The Hidden Agenda: Indian Policy and the Trudeau  
Government. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981.

World Health Organization. Environmental Health Criteria: Mercury.  
Geneva: World Health Organization, 1976.